

"Never look back unless you are planning to go that way." —Henry David Thoreau

COMPLETE WELLBEING

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Walk out on your past

4 powerful tools for
letting go, moving on,
and releasing regrets

p20



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A fresh start

What do we do with medications that are past their expiry date? We discard them without much thought. We do the same with food items that begin to rot. Yet, when it comes to our life situations, we are unable to let go of them even after they are past their due date.

There's nothing permanent in our world. Everything comes with a shelf life. Every day ends paving way for a new one. Every season passes before a new season begins. People too, leave the world even as new ones arrive. Why, even the mighty sun has an expiry date. Astrophysicists say that some day in the distant future, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years from now, it will cease to exist.

In the known universe, endings are an inevitable fact of life and each of us knows that. But we still develop attachments and cling to things, people and situations and, when faced with an ending, we are unable to accept it with grace. Our whole life is a story of endings and beginnings and yet we find it difficult to honour endings and to let go of the past. We are so afraid of losing what we have that we forget that every ending ushers a fresh new beginning and in the process, we forego a big share of our peace, joy and fulfilment.

Why are we unable to let go even when it's painful to hold on? The answer is fear. Fear of uncertainty. Thich Nhat Hanh says, "People have a hard time letting go of their suffering. Out of a fear of the unknown, they prefer suffering that is familiar."

This issue is our attempt to help you overcome the fear of letting go, of breaking up with your past. In the cover story, award-winning author Patricia Spadaro busts four myths that keep us from moving on. She also shares four tips that will help you to forge a fresh alliance with new possibilities in your life. "Although it might not seem so at first, every ending has its purpose and its gift. To help you awaken to this truth, when you experience an ending of any sort, think of it as a graduation or a promotion. Graduations not only signal the end of an era in your life but also celebrate the beginning of a new one. That's why they're called 'commencement' exercises," she writes. Whether you feel stuck due to indecision or are trying to deal with some kind of loss—physical, emotional or financial—you will find Patricia's matter-of-factly approach easy to relate to, and relevant.

I reckon her advice will come in quite handy in your endeavour to start afresh. As you let go of whatever is holding you back from your own joy, don't forget to wear your metaphorical graduation cap—after all, it is the beginning of a new phase of your life.

Manoj Khatri



Manoj Khatri

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Our whole life is a story of endings and beginnings and yet we find it difficult to honour endings and to let go of the past

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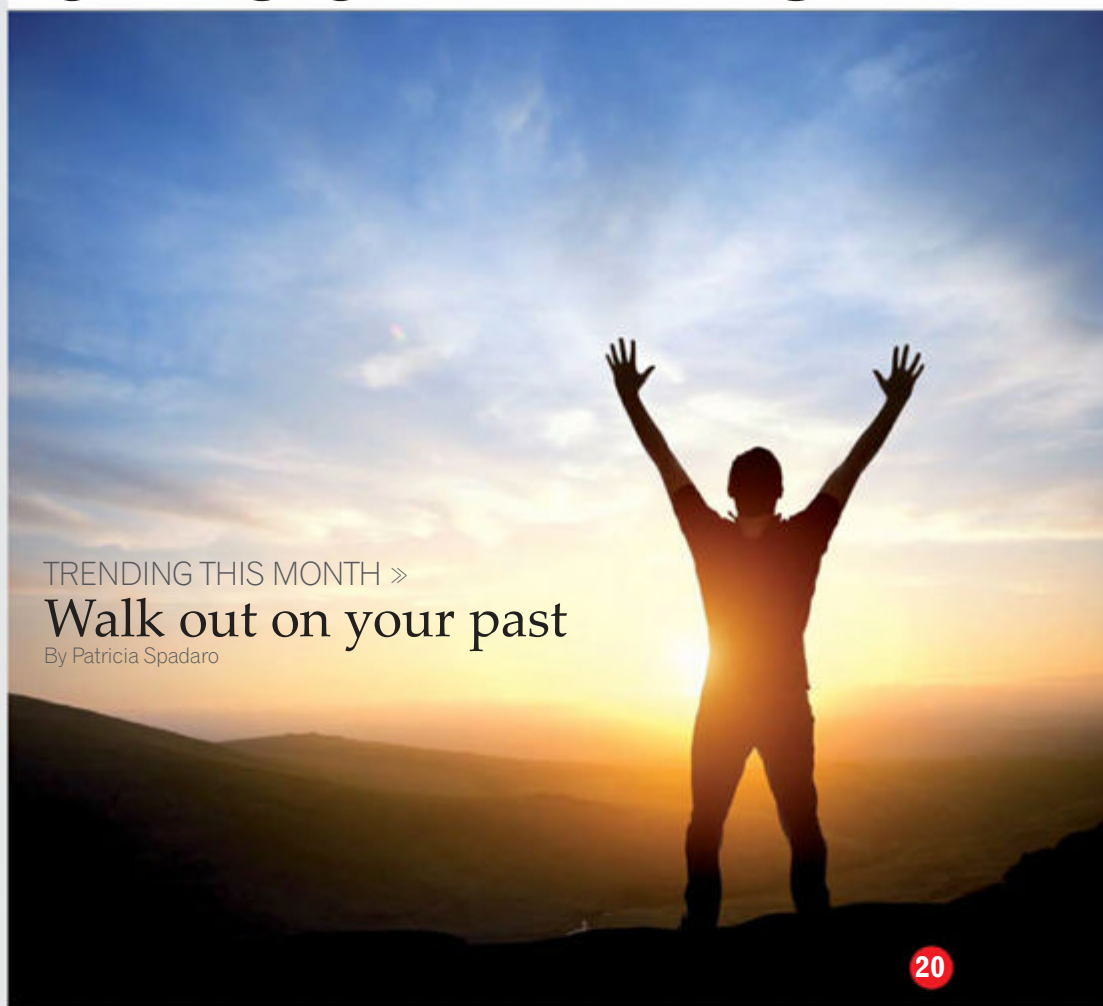


SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

TRENDING THIS MONTH »

Walk out on your past

By Patricia Spadaro



20

MANAGE »

Marriage and intimacy

36 When your partner is depressed

By Phoebe Hutchison

Health & vitality

50 The dark side of menopause

By Rishma Dhillion Pai

Ailments

57 Get rid of the syndrome X

By Vimal Pahuja

RESOLVE »

Parenting

**40 Raising kids in a
gender-free world**

By Ankita Khanna

42 Bullies at school

By Chetna Mehrotra

Food and nutrition

69 Yin Yang foods

By Kavita Mukhi



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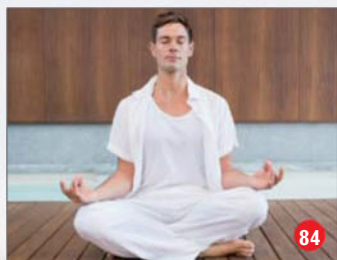


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EXPLORE »

Perspective

- 32 My search for a soulmate**
By Mariko Miyake

Food & nutrition

- 64 Cooking with lettuce**
By Anjali Pathak

- 88 Farming in your balcony**
By Nitya Anand Nadar

Consciousness

- 84 A first time experience at the 10-day Vipassana**
By Gabriel Rocheleau

Travel

- 92 Doing nothing in Bhimtal**
By Sakshi Nanda

TRANSFORM »

Consciousness

- 80 Understanding surrender**
By Osho



DECIDE »

Marriage & intimacy

- 34 Living my storybook romance**
By Alexandra Madhavan

Sleep

- 48 Claim your lost sleep**
By Leo Babauta

Career & workplace

- 78 Is work from home an option?**
By Chandana Banerjee

UNWIND »

Humour

- 74 When you're blessed with annoying co-workers**
By Margaret Andrews

UNLEARN »

Mind & emotions

- 54 Retirement is a state of mind**
By Kathy Merlino

DISCOVER »

Yôgâ

- 45 Poses for office time**
By Esther Ekhart

Self-help

- 58 Family constellations: an introduction**
By Suzi Tucker and Anupama Joshi

Career & workplace

- 72 Be your own kind of leader**
By Takashi Hata

REGULARS »

- 08 Events**
10 Talkback
12 Happy happenings
17 Month freshener
18 Write notes
38 CW Select
62 Confession booth
96 New kits on the block
98 Reflections



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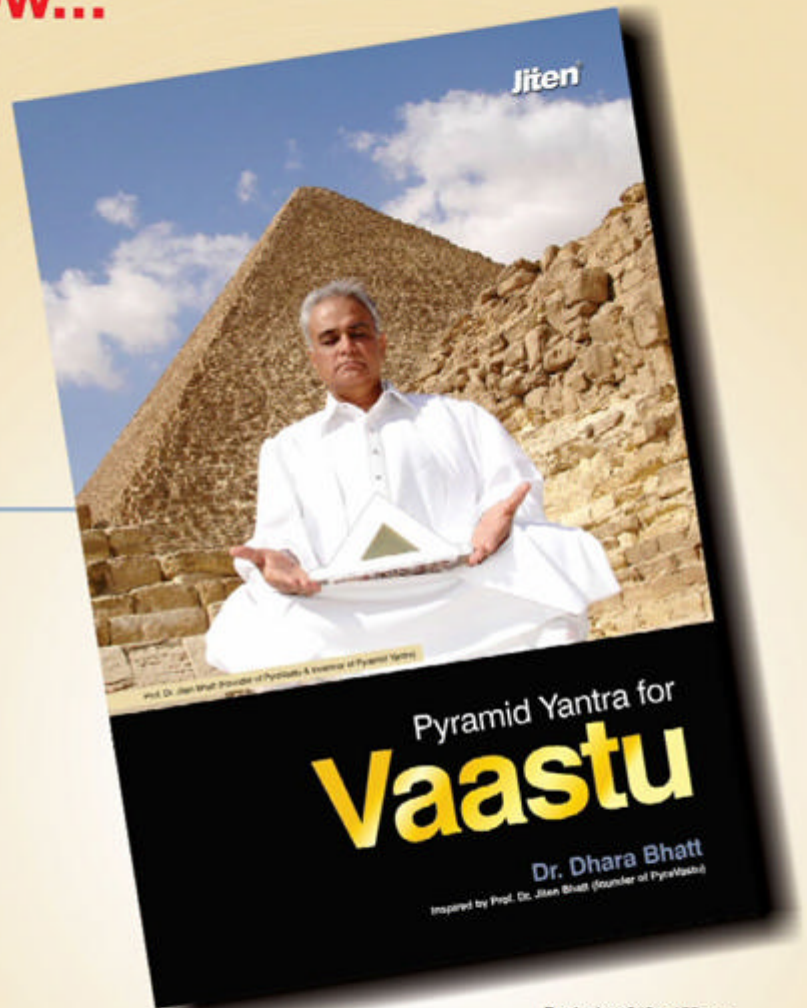
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» Chennai Jackfruit Festival

The Chennai Jackfruit Festival is the largest of its kind happening in the country. With over 96 varieties of delicacies to experience, your taste buds will never forgive you if you miss it! The jackfruit buffet will serve cuisines ranging from continental to traditional Kerala. You can also shop for jackfruit savouries, ice-creams, squashes and chocolate.

When: 1st – 3rd May 2015, 11.30am – 9pm

Where: Chennai Trade Centre, Off Porur Road

Contact: www.chennaijackfruitfest.com

» ISHMA Spiritual awards 2015

Block your date for this one of a kind Spiritual and Wellness award function that brings together experts from the healing and wellness industry. Presenters for the event will be trainers from the field of mind mapping, money manifestation, neurolinguistic manipulation, aura cleansing and more. The other highlights of the evening will be performances by Sufi maestro Zia Nath. Rivesh Vade will also present a sound healing session with Tibetan Bowls.

When: April 3rd 2015, 7pm – 10pm

Where: Rangsharda Auditorium, Bandra, Mumbai,

Contact: Ms Shobhaa Arya, 9769442519, ishma2015@gmail.com



» The Lil Flea Anniversary Edition

The Lil Flea brings together artists, mavericks, designers, chefs, startups and many more... to create a thriving community. It is also for those who appreciate art in its most innovative and user-friendly form. Being the Anniversary Edition, this is going to be more fun than what it has been so far. Gear up for some exciting shopping with 200 pop-up shops, 30 food pop-ups and 10 live bands! The book exchange will include story telling and poetry sessions. There is live art for the benefit of trees as well as group games, if you wish to while away your time.

When: 10th, 11th and 12th April 2015, 4pm – 11pm

Where: Bandra Kurla Complex Grounds

» Zor, dancing the Gypsy Trail

To commemorate the International Romani Gypsy Day, a storyteller, six dancers and a drummer, will take you on an epic journey of music and dance. Zor is the 1000-year-old journey from the deserts of north-western India, to the streets of Egypt, through the old empires of Turkey and the icy plains of Russia, to the sea caves of southern Spain.

Zor persists in its quest for the ultimate fruit of all human endeavour: freedom.

When: 8th April 2015, 8pm

Where: Jagriti Theatre, Bangalore

Contact: indu.manohar@gmail.com



» Little Stars Art Festival

This event is India's biggest art festival for children and is a celebration of art forms created by child prodigies. The festival is organised by Booklings and includes two days of learning, interacting and witnessing the sheer creativity children have inside them.

When: 25th and 26th April 2015

Where: Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium, New Delhi.

Contact: info@booklings.in for your free passes



» Nainital wilderness trip [10 to 18 years]

Syat is a village on the periphery of the Corbett reserve forest in a small 'doon' valley near Kotabag. Surrounded by thick forest, Camp Kyari [2800 ft.] is located in an organic farm perched on a steep hill-slope and offers a bird's eye view of the Corbett landscape region spread out below. Some of the activities planned are kayaking, trekking, forest camping, bird watching, wildlife tracking and farming. The age group for this camp is 10 – 18 years and travel to the location will be by three-tier AC.

When: 17th – 26th May 2015

Where: Sat Tal, Nainital

Fees: ₹19400

Contact: info@kshitijworld.com

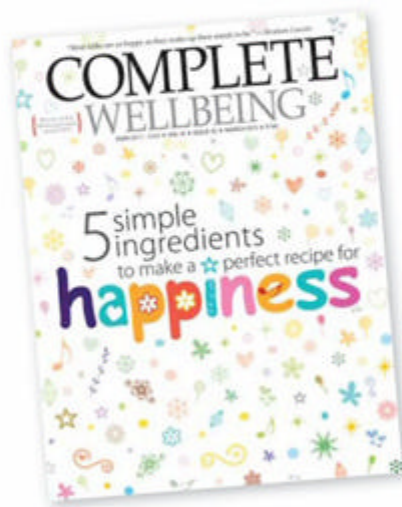
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Happiness is in my hands

I always knew that the keys to true happiness lay in my hands. But somehow I bought into the fallacy that having money, a large house, several cars and fame would bring me happiness. While those things did bring me joy, it was fleeting and I always felt that something was missing. And as much as I searched for contentment it evaded me. So it was indeed very humbling to learn that the ingredients to happiness were five simple facets—all within my control.

After reading the March cover story [Five ingredients to a happy life by Patricia Lorenz], I have begun to integrate some of her tenets and have indeed found a difference in my life. Though the change has not been immediate and it has been work in progress for me, I believe the aspects that she has covered are sustainable and I can use them to



lift me up whenever I want. Now I no longer depend on external sources for satisfaction.

—Ritish Sharma

Understanding kids with kleptomania

I always love going through *Complete Wellbeing*. Every issue has at least one exceptional article in it. I was surprised to see that CW had covered an article on kleptomania in children [Sticky fingers by Aanchal Agarwal]. It helped me a great deal because I recently found out that my 11-year-old son has kleptomania. This discovery was shameful and embarrassing for us as a family, especially since we

could afford to give our son the items that he brought home. It took me a while to understand why my son was acting in this way but reading Aanchal's article shone the light.

My family is currently working with a therapist to deal with this issue and I just wanted to say thank you for letting me know that I am not alone and that there are other families facing this problem.

—Alita Mukherjee

The joy of care giving

A few years ago, my husband met with an accident so severe that his leg had to be amputated. That was a difficult time for us and for him in particular. He felt helpless and went into depression for six months. Through medication and family support, he was able to cope with his situation and today he is as lively as he was before the accident.

When I read article 'The joy of recovering by Lisa Cox' in the March issue, I recalled the difficult times we went through. I must say that family does play a big role in recovery. One must learn that life doesn't end when crisis strikes, however we must accept the situation and learn to be happy. Her article is an inspiration to all those going through difficult moments. Thank you for yet another inspiring issue!

—Pallavi Bose



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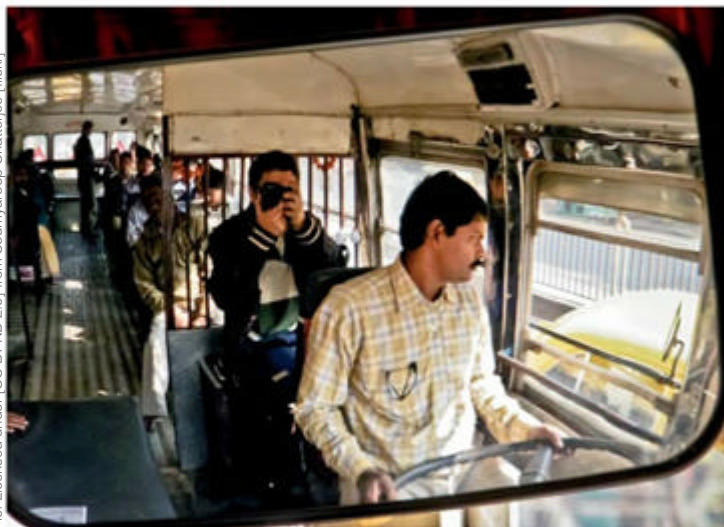
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A bus driver's thoughtful ritual makes villagers happy

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SINDHU RAMKUMAR WAS ON his way to Mysore by the state transport bus. Having just completed his exams, Sindhu was sleep deprived and therefore started snoring as soon as the bus took off. After covering a little distance, he was woken up by the driver's yelling as he threw a parcel to an old man sitting in a local tea stall.

Thinking that it must be some sort of prank, Sindhu ignored the incident and tried to go to sleep again. However, the bizarre occurrence kept reeling in his mind and he could not fall asleep. He then decided to enjoy the cool breeze as he observed the beauty of Wayanad from his window. After a while, once again the driver took something out from his bag and threw it to a few kids who seemed to be waiting for him.

Sindhu observed that the driver threw this 'something' to select people as he drove along and those who received this parcel were very happy and thanked the driver for their 'gift'.

Soon Sindhu's inquisitiveness got the better of him and he was determined to find out what it was that the driver was throwing to these people. He managed to peep into the bag and was surprised to see that day's newspapers in it. After speaking to the driver, Sindhu found out that his name is Krishnan and he is 60 years old. Krishnan distributes around 10 – 20 newspapers everyday to villagers who cannot afford to buy one. He feels that by doing this, he can help the needy in his own little way.

This village has not recorded a single crime in seven years

THE PANCHAYAT IN PIPLANTRI, a small village in southern Rajasthan, has been doing their bit to protect the girl child as well as increase the green cover in the region.

For the several years, the villagers have been planting 111 trees every time a girl child is born and the community works together to ensure that these trees survive as the girls grow up. This initiative was started by the village's former *sarpanch* Shyam Sundar in the memory of his daughter Kiran, who passed away.

The villagers have managed to plant around a quarter million trees of neem, sheesham, mango, amla and other species. In order to protect the trees from termites, the villagers have planted over two and a half million aloe vera plants around them. The villagers also plant 11 trees whenever a resident dies. Besides being beneficial for the planet, the people of Piplantri have discovered how to use these trees as a source of income.

On an average, 60 girls are born in the village every year and many villagers refuse to accept the birth of a girl, often resorting to infanticide. To protect girls in the village from such a fate, families with daughters are visited by the village committee. The committee collects a sum of ₹ 21,000 from the people of the village and ₹ 10,000 from the girl's father and this money is then put into a fixed deposit with a maturity period of 20 years. The parents are also made to sign an affidavit promising to educate her, to take care of the trees planted in her name, and most importantly not to get the child married before her legal age.

To keep their village flourishing, the village panchayat has also banned alcohol and cutting down of trees.

The villagers say that these measures have empowered them and claim that there has been no recorded crime in the village for the last seven to eight years.

~ANYTHING CAN BE HEALED~

"No illness exists that someone, somewhere, has not been healed of. What one person can do, any person can do. Remember, anything can be healed. We are all healers."

Martin Brofman's Body Mirror System of Healing

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35 years ago, **Martin Brofman**, author of *Anything can be Healed*, was diagnosed with terminal cancer and was given two months to live. He decided to work on himself and began exploring Eastern and Western philosophies and healing modalities. He was able to completely cure himself of the cancer and went on to develop the **Body Mirror System of Healing**.

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The parts of your body that do not work well reflect those parts of your life that are not doing well—be it money, relationships, career, sexuality or anything else. **The Body Mirror System** helps you resolve all those parts.



EVENT DETAILS

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Anne-Birte Christensen

[Healer and Senior Trainer of the Vision Workshop and Body Mirror System]

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- Get solutions to unpleasant life-situations that have been baffling you.

TESTIMONIALS

In September 2003 I was diagnosed with stage-3 breast cancer and was told that I needed a mastectomy immediately... Today I attended the hospital and saw the surgeon who wanted to remove my breast. She examined me and did an ultrasound and was obviously deeply puzzled when she was unable to find any sign of the tumour.

— CP [England]

"After the healing, my mother felt better, and a week ago she did the test to know at which stage the cancer was. Doctors were very astonished, the cancer in her lower abdomen is gone."

— MP [Italy]

Condition at the beginning of the class—spreading cancer – Type A Melanotic, showing in lymph chest / arm region. I went on the Intensive course because I didn't have much hope for the future, having had four operations for skin cancer, repeating pattern at the five year anniversary stage. After the course a PET scan showed the cancer in the lymph was no longer there. The blood test was normal and the ultra scan too.

— K M [Switzerland]

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**COMPLETE
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Live your best life!

Meet Gabi Mann, the girl who gets gifts from crows

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD GABI MANN from Seattle feeds the local crows that visit her garden. In return, they bring back shiny little trinkets and gifts for her.

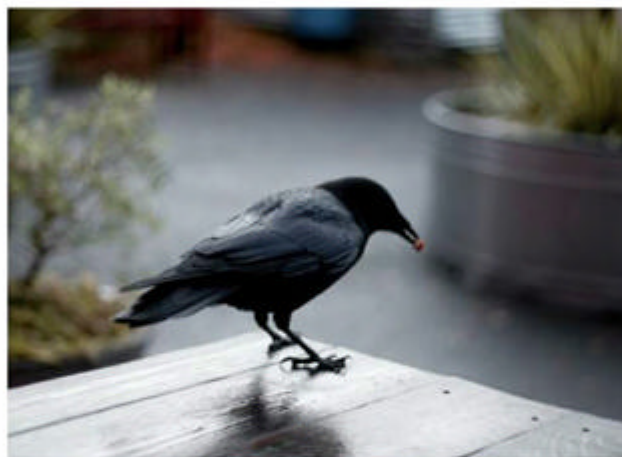
It all started when Gabi was four. She would walk around, accidentally dropping food. One day, as she got out of the car, she dropped a chicken nugget. Immediately a crow rushed to eat it and then called his friends to join, as Gabi watched in amazement. Delighted that she was able to help the birds, she started feeding them regularly with no intention of receiving anything in return.

However, the crows were not ungrateful.

The little girl soon started getting tiny-shiny gifts from her newfound friends with feathers.

Everyday Gabi fills the bird feeder with peanuts and once the crows have cleared the feeder they drop in glittery objects. Gabi has received an earring, a hinge, a polished rock, a Lego piece among other things. Her gifts are small enough to fit in the crow's mouth. She has preserved every gift brought to her by the crows and maintains an itemised collection.

Gabi's flying friends once helped find her mom's lost



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item. Lisa, Gabi's mom, lost her lens cap while taking photographs in the neighbourhood. The next morning, Lisa found the lens cap in the bird feeder. Sure enough, when the Manns viewed the feed from the bird-cam, they saw a crow fly in with the lens cap and even rinse it in the bird bath before putting it on the feeder.

Marine suffering from PTSD reunited with his canine companion

U.S. MARINE JARED HEINE returned home from Afghanistan because he suffered from a series of traumatic head injuries during the war. However, on the way back, Jared also got separated from Spike, his dog. This left him extremely depressed.

Since Spike had served as a bomb-sniffing combat dog



overseas, he was taken into the Virginia Capitol Police's K9 unit, where he was paired with Officer Laura Taylor.

Heine's mother set out to find Spike because Jared suffers from post traumatic stress

disorder [PTSD] and just talking about Spike helps him to calm down. Through the use of social media sites, Heine's mom was able to locate Laura who agreed to let Jared visit Spike. As soon as Laura saw Spike and Jared meet, she knew that they were meant to be together and gave Spike back to Jared. Spike proves that dog is indeed man's best buddy.

No hands but ample determination

BASANTI WAS BORN WITHOUT her hands. Fearing that she would be a burden to her parents and society, people from her village had advised her parents to kill their daughter. Due to her disability, Basanti's parents were hesitant to educate her but after Basanti's repeated requests, her mother finally sent her to school. There she learnt to write with her feet. Basanti continued her education after the class X and became a teacher.

She currently teaches at Rodaband secondary school, where she has many students. The fact that she has no hands doesn't stop her. She uses her feet to write on the blackboard and to correct papers.

After her father's retirement, Basanti became the sole wage earner in her family. She now shoulders the responsibility of feeding her family as well as getting her eldest sister married.



THE AUTHOR

Manoj Khatri is an infinite soul, disguised, among many things, as a writer. He has to his credit over 750 published articles on topics as diverse as strategic marketing, business management, healthcare and, of course, human potential, which happens to be his favourite subject. He is also a qualified

counsellor and has, through public seminars, inspired thousands of youngsters to discover and achieve their highest potential. He is editor and publisher of *Complete Wellbeing*, a leading magazine that promotes living with greater self-awareness.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

What a thought! is an interesting and well-written book. I found it to be simple yet profound. This book will be useful for a wide audience—be it leaders, professionals or youngsters—in their journey through life.

— **Deepak Parekh**, Chairman, HDFC Ltd.

The most complex thing in life is how to keep things simple. In 'What a Thought' Manoj is able to weave simplicity in complexity!"

— **Azim Jamal**, #1 Amazon & Barnes & Noble best-selling author

Manoj Khatri is an evolved writer with a keen understanding of human psychology. *What a thought!* is a passionate and positive expression of life that makes you look inward and alter your life. The book is a modern-day *Gita*, to be preserved by your bedside and delved into in times of turbulence.

— **Bhawana Somaaya**, Author & Critic

The old adage goes: 'if you can't say it with words say it with flowers'. But in this book, Manoj has said it with words *and* flowers, beautifully. I congratulate him on writing a book that, like sunshine, will spread light and revelations. I felt energised reading it!

— **Dr. Bhaskar Das**, Executive President, The Times of India Group*

This book is the perfect 'ready reckoner' for every therapist and student of counselling who needs to offer self-help tools to carry the gains of therapy outside the session.

— **Dr. Minnu Bhonsle**, Ph.D, Consulting Psychotherapist and Trainer in Counselling

This book shows that wisdom has no religion or country, and that it is timeless.

— **Dr. Rajan Bhonsle**, MD, Hon Professor and HOD, KEM Hospital & Seth G S Medical College

Every quote motivates... Manoj tends to the garden of life.

— **Dia Mirza**, Actor

*Designation at the time of giving testimonial

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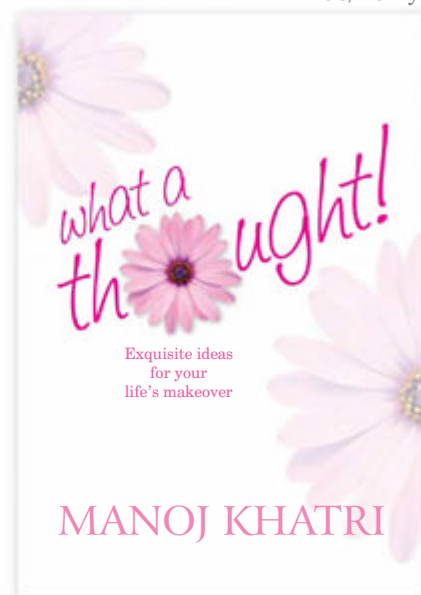
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These women can paint, fix steel and even operate cement mixers

AFTER WORKING ABROAD FOR 17 years, Santosh Parulekar, an engineering and management graduate, returned to India to set up Pipal Tree Ventures in 2007. Pipal Tree Ventures is a company with a difference because they are dedicated to creating organised employment for poor and landless village youth. The company has its main training centre in Hyderabad and has set up 23 schools in villages across Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

But what makes Pipal Tree Ventures unique is that it employs and teaches women to work in the construction industry. The women are taught masonry, steel fixing, painting and plumbing. They know how to operate cement mixers with ease, mix concrete in the right proportion, take measurements and erect the shuttering to pour concrete. Additionally, they can cut, bend and tie steel to place reinforcements inside the shuttering.

The experience of working with this company has been quite beneficial for women like Munni Devi, 35, who has been working at their Sonbhadra site. "I use part of the money I earn to buy fertiliser and seeds for our farm, and I spend some on my children," she says.

Pipal Tree Ventures provides transport, food, lodging and medical care for these women. The company is hoping to reduce the exploitation of women in the rural employment sector by spreading awareness about ethical practices.

How they doused fire of another kind

WHEN THE OYLER SCHOOL in Cincinnati, Ohio was shut for a fifth consecutive day due to a snow storm, Principal Kyle Niederman called a meeting of his staff. However, this meeting wasn't held for the usual reasons.

The school being shut meant a week without food for the low-income students who rely on free school lunches. The principal and the teachers were concerned about the many students who would be affected by the horrendous weather and pitched in to do whatever they could to douse the hunger of these kids.



Principal Kyle, along with two dozen staff members and volunteers, walked in sub-zero temperatures to each student's house with parcels of food. Within an hour the volunteers had distributed 100 quarts of soup, a carload of bread and 85 food packs to more than 100 hungry children and their families.

If you have an inspiring or heart-touching story or incident to share, email us at editorial@completewellbeing.com and we'll publish your story here.

References: www.sunnyskyz.com, www.logical.indian, www.goodnewsnetwork.org, www.letzchange.org, www.pipaltreeventures.com

MONTH FRESHENER

Infuse life into your days

COMPLETE
WELLBEING

April 2015

WED
1



Play a prank on your best friend. After all, it's April fool's day!

THU
9

Before your meals, say a prayer of gratitude for all those who have made it possible to put the food on your plate.

FRI
17



SAT
25

Go to a quiet place and spend some time recalling all those who have hurt you, and forgive them.

FRI
10



SAT
18



Feel cranky when stuck in traffic? Play some soothing music and massage your shoulders, arms and neck for instant relaxation.

FRI
3



SAT
11

Pay a compliment to a colleague who is least expecting it.

SUN
19

Call your financial advisor and plan your investments for the financial year. An early start is the wisest way to grow your wealth.

MON
27

Add a twist to the way you work in order to make your work a fun activity—be it at home or in office.

SAT
4

Write down a long-time worry on a piece of paper and burn it. Your mind will never bring it up again. It works!

SUN
12

Draw your curtains, switch-off your cell phone and drift to slumber land... nothing compares to a weekend mid-day siesta.

MON
20



TUE
28

Spend some time cleaning your workbag and wallet. It's good feng shui to invite prosperity.

SUN
5

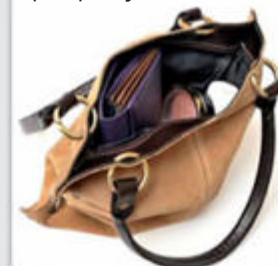


Easter Sunday

Prepare a few Easter eggs for the kids in your neighbourhood. You will feel blessed to see the joy on their faces.

TUE
21

Physical clutter leads to mental clutter. Take some time out to clean your workplace/desk.



WED
22



THU
30

How about decorating the entrance of your home with fresh flowers? It will ward off negativity and attract good will.

TUE
7

World health day
Is there a healthy habit you've forgotten? Think about it and take it up again. This time, stick to it!

WED
15

On your way home, stop by a salon for a relaxing head massage.

THU
23

Time to change your internet passwords.

MY
NOTE

WED
8

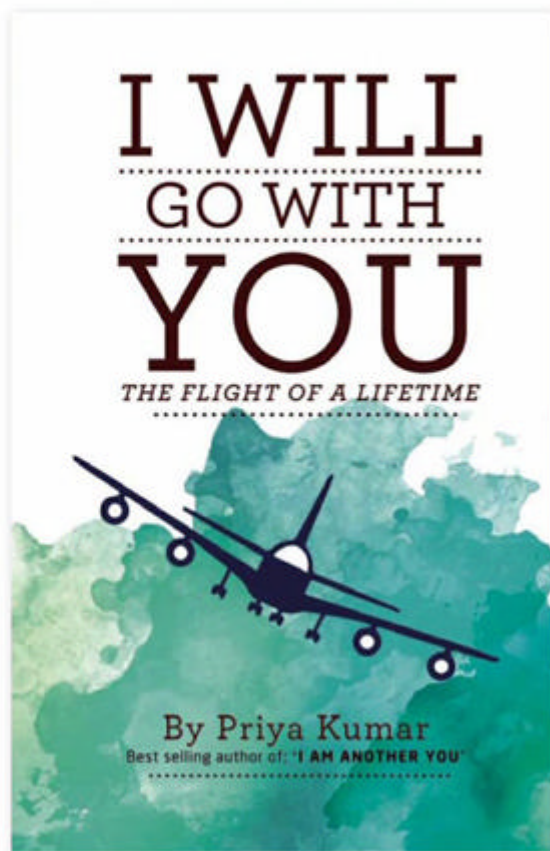


THU
16

Be more aware of your thirst—make it a point to have water as soon as you feel the need.



MY
NOTE



Through life's journey

I WILL GO WITH YOU: THE FLIGHT OF A LIFETIME

By Priya Kumar

- Published by: Cognite—an Imprint of Embassy Books
- ISBN: 978-9383359660 • Pages: 232 • Price: ₹250

Death and the afterlife are among the most debated issues, not just today, but forever. Do we go to heaven or hell? Do our loved ones remain in the skies, looking over us? Do they walk among us? What is the journey like? The questions are innumerable, and there are as many answers as there are people. The answers could be religious, spiritual, or philosophical, and there are many tomes which deal with it in detail. Priya Kumar's latest book deals with the same subject, though in a much simpler, easily readable manner—one that we can all relate to, and actually understand.

I will go with you is a story of 300 passengers and the crew aboard a flight, whose pilot has decided to commit suicide on duty. It might seem, at first glance, to be fatalistic, as well as macabre, but Priya Kumar tells us a story filled with adventure, twists and turns and suspense,

New releases

Everyone Can Heal

By Sonia Mackwani

- Published by: Jaico Books
- ISBN: 978-81-8495-649-8
- Pages: 248 • Price: ₹299

We all look for healing at some point in our lives and seek forgiveness, strength and understanding in order to live with positivity and grace. But what if the healer lies dormant within us, just waiting to be invoked?

Consisting of three books in a single volume, each book offers effective processes for 21 days to heal the physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and other dimensions of human existence. Whether you are a beginner

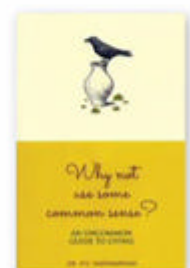
or an established healer, this book is a valuable guide to creating a life of consciousness and purpose.

Why Not Use Some Common Sense

By PV Vaidyanathan

- Published by: Leadstart Publishing
- ISBN: 978-9381576243
- Pages: 176 • Price: ₹199

Despite being blessed with the power of intelligence, logic, imagination and analysis, why do we struggle to use the gift of common sense in our lives? Why do we get irritated so often? Why do we feel guilty or get defensive? Why do we like to criticise or shy away from candid



intertwined with deep philosophy and as well as discussions on life and death that leads the reader to introspection.

There are 300 passengers on board, but we hear the stories of only those in row 26: Sarah, a writer, struggling to decide whether to trust her boyfriend, or not; Jim, a young man obsessed with technology, who falls in love with Sarah the minute he sets eyes on her; Muttu, a clairvoyant and blogger, the only one who has an inkling of the death that awaits all of them; and Paul, a rich and successful businessman who struggles with questions about life and living in the larger perspective, and who changes his seat from the Business class to join the other three on Row 26 in Economy, thus leading to the conversations which enable him to finally get answers to his questions, albeit at the very end of his life.

In this book, Priya Kumar lives up to her reputation of being a stellar story-teller who has developed a keen knack of inspiring people even as she entertains them. Her wisdom flows through in the dialogues by Muttu, the most evolved character of this story.

This is an intriguing story that combines the heavy questions of life, death and everything in

between, in the form of a suspense thriller. The author intersperses the fictional narrative with bits of philosophical thought, making make us stop and think about the situation, and even helps us relate them to our own circumstances. In spite of this, the story doesn't lose its momentum.

The book is aptly titled for it is indeed a journey of a lifetime—for the passengers of the flight as well as for the reader. After all, every journey of life ends in death.

I especially like the end, because it reminded me of a conversation I recently had with my son, where he said that in his opinion, people who die, don't really go to heaven or hell. They stay back, unseen, with their loved ones, in the form of memories. Priya's ending, though not exactly the same, brought back that conversation, and I appreciated how she turned the negative emotions into positive ones, by choosing to let her departed characters turn inspirational—for those they loved, as well as those who needed them.

The genre of 'inspirational suspense' is new to me, but this is one book I enjoyed reading!

■ By Anuradha Shankar

conversation? This book takes a clear-eyed look at day-to-day life, in which, by simply altering our perspective and using some common sense, we can mitigate our issues. The author is a practising paediatrician in Mumbai and this is his 6th book.

Special Lassi

By Amrita Chatterjee

- Published by: Jaico Books
- ISBN: 978-81-8495-649-8
- Pages: 248 • Price: ₹299

In the summer of 2011, two bleary-eyed kids, teetering on the cusp of adulthood, decide to drop out of their daily routine and just travel. However, right after

they hit the road, their plans go down the drain. Soon they see themselves barrelling over potholes as large as the lunar craters in Nepal, bungee jumping in Rishikesh, waking up to Buddhist chants in Sikkim and cycling down the world's highest motorable pass in Ladakh.

Throughout their journey, they constantly encounter a stream of oddballs like the five-second tea lady, the flute-playing hotel manager, flying Sonam, reggae junkies and many more. With one part funny, two parts crazy and a whisper of wistful, *Special Lassi* is a journey about rolling with the punches.



Walk out on your past

4 myths
that can keep you stuck in the past
+
4 powerful tools
for letting go and moving on

Whether you've experienced a recent loss or are struggling with a painful ending you've never come to grips with, you can get unstuck and move forward. **Patricia Spadaro** shares the most common myths that keep you trapped in the past plus some powerful tools that will free you from pain and help you move on more quickly

“The beginning and the end
reach out their hands to each other”
— *Chinese proverb*

Endings can be tough. When someone or something pulls the rug out from under you, you may find yourself drowning in a sea of emotions ranging from grief and anger to fear or blame.

Whether you’ve experienced a recent loss or are struggling with a painful ending you’ve never come to grips with, you can get unstuck and move forward by taking two important steps. First, learn to challenge the myths about endings that may have settled, unquestioned, into your mind and heart. Then pull out your toolkit [provided in part two of this article] and choose the right tools to help you move beyond the myths to the magic of honouring the ending and releasing energy-draining regrets. Here are some of the most dangerous myths that can keep you trapped in the past plus some powerful tools that can free you from pain and help you move on more quickly.





Patricia Spadaro is the award-winning author of *Honor Yourself: The Inner Art of Giving and Receiving*. She is dedicated to empowering others to live more deeply, fully, and authentically. Her books are published in over 20 languages worldwide. For more inspiration, visit her at HowToHonorYourself.com.

Myth: If an ending comes into my life, something must be wrong.

Magic: Endings are a natural part of life's cycles. I honour myself by accepting them and the transformations they bring.

We've all been told that change is good for us. At least that's what sages, psychologists and management gurus say. Why, then, do we tend to dig in our heels and so fiercely resist the changes that inevitably come to our doorsteps? This is because, for one, we cling to the false belief that endings are not natural—that if an ending comes into our lives, something must have gone terribly wrong.

Yet that's not what nature teaches us. Each day, each season, each full moon comes to an end to allow a new cycle of regeneration to begin again. Endings are not exceptions to the rule; they *are* the rule. Our inner and outer worlds are governed by that same

If you catch yourself reacting to an impending ending with resistance, bitterness, or anger, take a moment to compassionately remind yourself that endings are not only natural but necessary



cycle of change and transformation. Every one of us takes part in the universal dance of transformation as our outworn habits, relationships and ways of seeing give way to new ones.

Although it might not seem so at first, every ending has its purpose and its gift. To help you awaken to this truth, when you experience an ending of any sort, think of it as a graduation or a promotion. Graduations not only signal the end of an era in your life but also celebrate the beginning of a new one. That's why they're called 'commencement' exercises.

Endings, like graduations, often come because we are ready for a new lesson to begin or have exhausted the opportunities that our current situation has to offer. Endings show us that we need a change of scene to bring new people and new possibilities into our lives.

That is exactly what a friend of mine experienced when she broke up with her boyfriend of six years. For quite a while afterwards, she had gnawing doubts that saying goodbye had been the right thing to do, even though her ex had treated her badly and even cheated on her. It took her months to let go of regrets and see that this ending was good for her. She had, in fact, become root-bound in that relationship. Like a plant that atrophies in a pot that is too small to contain its growing root system, she had run out of room to grow in the relationship. Her partner's immature behaviour was simply life's way of moving her to more fertile ground. In reality, she had been promoted—and he had been fired.

Once she finally accepted her 'promotion', she could experience the gifts it brought with it. She had more energy, made wonderful new friends, and even mustered up the courage to find a new job where her talents were appreciated and she could grow.

My friend's initial reaction is typical of what we all tend to do when faced with an ending, whether it's a deteriorating relationship, a job change, or even the prospect of finding a new place to live. When an ending is in the wings getting ready to walk on stage, we may develop a desperate urge to hold on to what



By refusing to accept the ending,
we prolong our pain and push away
the good that is in store for us

we are comfortable with. We frantically want to 'fix' the situation, when our inner self is asking us to transcend it altogether. But we only prolong our pain by refusing to accept that the ending is really choreographed by our own soul for our own good.

If you catch yourself reacting to an impending ending with resistance, bitterness or anger, take a moment to compassionately remind yourself that endings are not only natural but necessary. Take the time you need to grieve and process a serious loss, but then look forward with wonder and expectation, knowing that you needed to turn off the road you were travelling on to meet that something new that is awaiting you. Take a page from the *I Ching*, the ancient book of wisdom, which advises, "When the way comes to an end, then change—having changed, you pass through."

Myth: If I let go of this relationship, job, or situation, I may never get a better opportunity.

Magic: When I say goodbye to a situation that isn't right for me, I create the space for a new gift to enter my life.

Have you ever been afraid to make a change in your life, even when you are unhappy or frustrated, thinking, "If I give up what little I have, I may never find anything better"? Have you ignored what your feelings are trying to tell you, turning to logic instead to find the direction you're looking for? While our feelings can certainly carry us off course at times, they are also a pathway to the truth—your inner truth—if you listen to them.


It's essential to evaluate your feelings as you would any other piece of information you

gather so that you can make an emotionally intelligent choice in every situation. Logic alone won't get you there. In the words of the great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, "A mind all logic is like a knife all blade; it makes the hand bleed that uses it."

Lani discovered how life-changing it could be to follow through on what her feelings were telling her when she was unexpectedly faced with an issue that challenged both her career and her character. She thought she had finally found the perfect job. It was in the right location and on the right career track, and she was working directly with the owner of the company as his assistant. Then one day she discovered

that her boss was dealing unethically with his clients. She knew this was wrong and hoped that something or someone would come along to correct the situation so she wouldn't have to rock the boat. But nothing changed, and Lani knew that she could not let the situation go unchallenged. When she finally mustered the courage to speak to her boss, he brushed aside her concerns. So she told him that if he didn't stop his behaviour, she would quit in one week. Seven days later, Lani found herself walking out the door with nothing but a small box of her belongings in her arms.

As she paused in the downstairs lobby of the office building to catch her breath,



Sometimes walking away is the right way to be walking. It creates an opening for life to work its magic

wondering what she would do now with no job, no severance package, and no leads, an older, well-dressed gentleman stopped next to her. He was having some trouble opening his new briefcase. Lani instinctively offered to help and figured out the problem right away.

"You're clever," the man said, thanking her.

"If I'm so clever," she shot back without thinking, "then maybe you should hire me!"

As it turned out, the man was looking for a good office manager. Lani was a great fit for the job. "He was so respectful, and that new job paid much more than the old one," she later told me. "I really didn't have to be worried at all about taking a stand for what I believed in or about leaving that job." In fact, the universe was just waiting for her to make room in her life to receive the gift of this new job. Sometimes walking away is the right way to be walking. It creates an opening for life to work its magic.

Myth : By forgiving others, I am condoning their behaviour and dishonouring myself.

Magic: By forgiving, I am honouring myself. I am affirming that I am greater than what others think of me or do to me.

Do you still feel sad or angry about an ending in your life—a relationship break-up, a harsh word from a friend, a job you didn't get? Whether you realise it or not, holding on to the past with regret means that you're operating with less than 100 per cent of your energy in the present. Regrets divide your attention and sap your energy. One way to reclaim your energy is to plug the holes by forgiving and saying good-bye to those energy-draining regrets. It's not always easy, but it's essential if you want to live fully and share the best of yourself with others.

The real reason we don't forgive more easily is that we harbour misconceptions about what forgiveness is and what happens when we forgive. The picture many of us have in our heads is that forgiveness is for weaklings. We think forgiving is giving in to a bully who has

no business pushing us around. We may also believe that by forgiving, we are condoning the perpetrator's harmful behaviour and giving that person the green light to keep acting that way. Those are no more than myths.

Forgiveness does not require that you approve of another's outrageous behaviour or foolishly subject yourself to it again. You can forgive and still take steps to protect yourself. You can forgive and still be clear about what you will not accept in your life from now on. Likewise, forgiveness does not wipe out the fact that an action someone took was despicable. The act of forgiveness does not excuse any of us from being accountable for the harm we have done.

By forgiving, you are simply honouring yourself. You are affirming that you are greater than what others think of you or do to you. You are showing yourself and others that no one has the power to define who you are just because they treated you a certain way. Author Rabbi Harold Kushner once explained this to a resentful woman in his community who was struggling to support three children after her husband walked out on them. When she asked him how she could possibly forgive this man, he told her, "I'm not asking you to forgive him because what he did was acceptable. It wasn't... I'm asking you to forgive because he doesn't deserve the power to live in your head and turn you into a bitter, angry woman."

It's not what others do to us that defines who we are. Our attitude, our actions, the

*Forgiveness does not
require that you approve
of another's outrageous
behaviour or foolishly
subject yourself to it again.
You can forgive and still take
steps to protect yourself*



quality of our heart—how we treat *ourselves* and well as others—is what defines who we are and how our life unfolds.


Myth: By refusing to forgive, I am in control.

Magic: What I do not forgive controls me. By forgiving, I free myself.

Many of us have come to believe that by refusing to forgive others, we are cutting them out

of our lives, thereby ending our connection with them. But continuing to hold a grudge—emphasis on the word *hold*—is no ending at all. By harbouring bitterness, resentment, or even the desire for revenge, we remain mentally and emotionally invested in what happened. That only keeps us in relationship with—connected with—the very people we want to cut out of our lives.

Attention is energy. Whenever you place your attention on another person or thing, you are creating a flow of energy between the two



Forgiveness frees you from the bondage of anger, resentment and melancholy

of you. It doesn't matter if your thoughts are loving or filled with irritation and anger. In either case, you are creating an energy bond that is fed by your attention. And, for better or for worse, where your attention goes, your energy goes.

When you understand this energy equation, it's easy to see that you automatically tie yourself to anyone you continue to hate, resent, or be angry with. You may think that rancour is the right response when you want to distance yourself from others, but at energetic levels your bitterness binds you to them. It strengthens the connection.

Although we may fool ourselves into thinking that withholding forgiveness gives us a measure of control, in reality whatever we allow to siphon off our valuable energy and attention controls us. When we do not forgive, it is we who suffer. Perhaps you've heard this saying that puts it even more strongly: not forgiving someone is like drinking poison—and expecting the other person to die.

A graphic portrayal of what happens when we hold on to our anger comes from the movie *Return of the Jedi* in the Star Wars series. During the climactic scene, the evil emperor and Darth Vader are face to face with Luke Skywalker. The emperor has been patiently waiting for the opportunity to turn Luke to the Dark Side, just as he had done to Darth Vader many years before. As the emperor and Luke confront each other, the old man goads Luke as he spits out these words: "The hate is swelling in you now. Take your Jedi weapon. Use it... Strike me down with it."

Then the emperor sums up exactly what anger and non-forgiveness do to us as he says to Luke, "Give in to your anger. With each passing moment, you make yourself more my servant." The emperor knew that the more we hate, the more we surrender ourselves to the object of our hatred. Fortunately, Luke controls himself before it is too late. By putting his attention back on his real self and on love, he not only saves himself but is also able to bring Darth Vader back to the Light Side.

Lest you think that all this sounds a bit too intangible and that the benefits of forgiveness

Although we may fool ourselves into thinking that withholding forgiveness gives us a measure of control, in reality whatever we allow to siphon off our valuable energy and attention controls us



are metaphysical mumbo jumbo, know that a burgeoning field of research is proving otherwise. Studies have shown that holding on to blame, hostility, and anger can harm us in very tangible ways. One study, for instance, showed that unforgiving thoughts prompted significantly higher heart rates and blood pressure changes, whereas forgiving thoughts were accompanied by lower physiological stress responses. In research with people who suffered from chronic low back pain, those who were able to forgive had lower levels of pain and less anger and depression than those who had not forgiven. In another study, women who had forgiven the fathers of their children for transgressions had less symptoms of anxiety and depression as well as a greater sense of self-acceptance and purpose in life than unforgiving women.

The opportunity to forgive, then, is just that—a stunning opportunity *for you*. Will you allow another's immature behaviour to define you now and forever? Will you let the incident forever define the person who hurt you? What someone else says or does can only continue to weigh you down if you carry around the memories of those actions like a perpetual sack of good-for-nothing stones strapped to your back. How freeing to just put down the load and move on. How much faster and farther you can travel. Without the burden, you can even fly.



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Rather than facing endings with bitterness, regret, or hatred, try these four energy-boosting tips that can help you honour the ending and move on.

4 Tips for

honouring endings, releasing regrets, and moving on

Tip #1 – Reframe endings as graduations

While it's natural at first to react to painful endings with bitterness, try to resist the temptation to automatically label an ending as 'bad' and pull the covers over your head [or drown your sorrows in a bag of chocolates or a shopping binge you can't afford]. Instead, take this turn of events as an unerring message that it's time to move to higher ground.

TRY THIS.....

Practise seeing any ending or seemingly negative situation as full of promise, even though you don't yet see what it will bring you. Perhaps the ending came because you 'graduated' from this circumstance or you need to learn a new soul lesson in another venue. Perhaps you can only find and hone your unique talents by being with a new circle of friends. What if the situation you were suddenly booted out of held a hidden danger for you? Every ending holds its own gift. Opening your mind and heart to receive it will keep you moving forward, not looking backward.



Tip #2 Bring closure by being proactive

If you've done something in the past that still plagues you, consider taking action to set things right. Rather than allowing recurring thoughts about the incident to continually weigh you down with regrets or sorrow, lighten your load by changing how the story ends.

TRY THIS.....

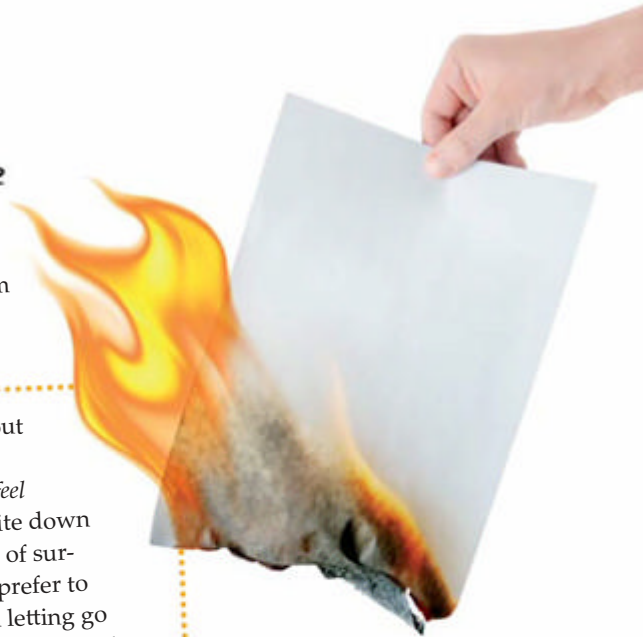
Find those you may have hurt and apologise to them, even if the incident took place years ago. Replace the object you destroyed or the money you deprived the other person of. If you can't work with the person involved for some reason, assign yourself a task that will at least begin to balance the scales for what happened. For example, do volunteer work, donate to a charity, help an elderly neighbour with chores or mentor a child. Allow yourself to bring closure by being proactive.

Tip #3 Create your own ritual of release

Doing something to physically mark an ending can help you release regrets once and for all. Create a ritual that has meaning for you, but always make it physical to give it finality. And don't forget to perform your ritual with the intent to free yourself and move on.

TRY THIS

Hold a shell or stone; mentally pour your feelings about a past incident into it, and then fling that object into a stream or off the side of the mountain as you *see* and *feel* the situation disappear from your life. Or you can write down your feelings on paper along with a simple statement of surrender. You can ask God [or use whatever name you prefer to address the creative Spirit of the universe] for help in letting go and finding peace. Then safely burn the letter, watching it and the issue dissipate in smoke. Let those ashes remind you of the phoenix who, at the end of its life, ignites its nest and is consumed by the fire. From the ashes of its own ending, a new phoenix emerges. Know that you, too, have the phoenix inside of you.



Tip #4 Write a new story

One incident in your life, no matter how painful, is still just one incident. It doesn't define your entire life—unless you let it. You have the power to create the rest of the story. When you choose to stop talking about and dwelling on the past, and focus instead on healthy new choices for yourself, you are saying, "I am greater than what others say about me or do to me."



TRY THIS

Each time you catch yourself complaining about or dwelling on a negative experience from the past, *stop*. Remember—what you concentrate on is what you energise. Instead of looking back, ask yourself: *What new and positive outcomes do I want to show up in my life?* Start focussing on and talking out loud about your new plans with excitement. Ask your friends to support you by doing the same rather than continually dredging up the past or treating you like a victim. You are the author of the next chapter of your life. Start your rewrite right now. Grab a piece of paper and write down in detail the answer to these questions: *What do I want the next chapter of my life to look like and feel like? What new characters will be a part of the next scenes of my life story? What one step can I take today to turn my storyline in this new direction?*



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Look for kindness

While finding your significant other can be extremely fulfilling, don't forget that you don't need a better half to be a better person

■ By Mariko Miyake

HE WAS SUPPOSED to be different. I had paid my dues. After all the men I had dated, you would think I would've gotten my act together, that I'd finally be an expert at choosing the right guy. And I thought he was. Here was a man who seemed to understand my heart, who taught me how to speak up, who cheered me up on those not so good days when it felt like the whole world was against me. It was easy to believe that he was the good catch I had been waiting for. A few weeks before my 40th birthday, he left a large gift bag outside my office door. When I looked inside, there was a card, a box of ginger lemon cookies and his favourite childhood book. To say that I was touched was an understatement. Never before had any man done something so unexpectedly kind for me.

I was stood up yet again

But, as I was sitting in Starbucks, watching the minute hand move farther and farther away from six 'o clock, I realised that I was

mistaken. I had been stood up—again. I wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt. *Maybe he was in traffic*, I thought to myself, even though I knew he lived five minutes away. I waited 45 minutes, hoping he would walk through those glass doors, apologising profusely for his lateness. But he didn't show up. I was left to sit there alone, cruelly sandwiched between two couples. I could have called him for sure but I was tired of always calling people. For once, I wanted to be important enough for a man to remember.

As I drove home that evening, I didn't cry. I wasn't even angry. It was more like my heart was sighing, like it had already accepted the fact that I would never find a man, at least not one who cared about me and my feelings. *If I had been prettier, would that have made a difference?* I thought to myself. Maybe nicer eyes or clearer skin or bigger bust would have made him remember. But before I could descend into that well of self-doubt again, I heard his voice loud and clear—a seven-year-old saying to me, "Look for kindness."

The rise and fall of my optimism

When I turned 33, I had felt like I had reached this pivotal age. I mean, Jesus died at that age. That was momentous. And here I was, still bitching and moaning that I didn't have a man. Well, that year I was determined

to do something different, something more proactive to change my single status. So I joined a dating service and I told all my friends that I was open to being set up.

The thing about starting a new project is that in the beginning, you're so optimistic. I would say to myself, "Surely, in this sea of men, the one I want is out there looking for me." But as the months dragged on, and the dates began to blend into one big bad date, I became less and less sure. By the middle of the year, a part of me had already given up.

One day, I was sitting with my seven-year-old nephew, bemoaning the state of my affairs. The poor kid had watched me come back from each date, looking depressed and feeling like love would never happen for me. "Look for kindness," he said, trying to cheer me up.

"What?"

"Kindness, that's what you need to look for, Aunty."

I scoffed at him. I put on that air of what do you know, kid? I wasn't about to take love advice from someone who thought the mall was a honeymoon destination or that fifty dollars was a lot of money to spend on a wedding ring. Didn't he know? I *was* looking for kindness. I *was* trying to keep my heart open. But it just wasn't working. Over the course of that year, I had been stood up more times than I'd like to count. One of the guys even fled the restaurant minutes after I arrived, saying that he had an emergency. And then, there were the weird ones like that one guy who thought it was a gallant show of affection to kiss my hand on the first date. There could not be enough hand sanitiser to get rid of that creepy feeling. My nephew didn't get it. Who could blame him? He was seven. He was innocent to the storms of life. But in retrospect, it was me who didn't get it.

Meet the 12-year-old sage

Of course, I ignored my nephew's advice and kept pushing forward in dating. There were some high points I guess. It's not like I didn't experience kindness; I did. Men opened their car doors for me and made nice conversation but no one really seemed to care about getting to know me in particular. It was all

surface stuff. At that point, I thought I was going to die an old maid. The week before I turned thirty-nine, I was weeping almost every day. "No!" I said to the universe, "I won't turn 40 yet! Not until you give me what I want!" Now, the universe wasn't going to listen to some bratty middle-aged woman who thought she deserved all the entitlement of a two-year-old.

When my birthday finally did arrive, no one wanted to go out with me. And I mean, no one. My parents finally convinced my nephew, age 12, to accompany poor aunty on her day out. Looking back on that day now, I feel bad. I spent the whole time recounting the horrors of my love life. Our conversation went something like this, "And then I dated him. Oh, and that was a disaster." But my nephew didn't even flinch. He listened patiently and nodded his head at all the proper times. Next to me, the boy looked like a darn sage. By the end of the day, when he said to me, "I'm sure you'll find someone, Aunty" I almost believed him.

Being kind, finally

But when I heard my nephew's voice on that drive home, it finally clicked. When he said look for kindness, it wasn't about the guys at all. It was about *me* being kind to myself. That kindness and thoughtfulness I was searching for I already had within me. I just needed to find it and nurture it. If I couldn't find it in myself then I wasn't ever going to find it in someone else. Over the next couple of weeks, I realised that I needed to take time to get to know me and fill up my own worth. I needed to take my self-worth out of the relationship equation. No one would get to determine that anymore except for me. I was going to be kind to myself regardless if I had a man in my life or not.

I couldn't really be mad at the guy who stood me up. How could I? Now that I know myself better, I realised that him not showing up that night was more a reflection on him rather than on my own worth. Yes, I was stood up again, but this time, it wasn't my fault. In the end, he didn't see all that he was missing. Thank goodness, I did.



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A long lasting marriage is sheer hard work, but worth every bit of it, says [Alexandra Madhavan](#)

A rollercoaster called marriage

I AM COMING UP on my 10-year anniversary with my life partner and the last decade together has been nothing short of a rollercoaster ride. We committed to each other when we fell deeply in love, not really knowing the ebbs and flows of what a life commitment meant.

Not long after we fell in love, my husband had an accident and his body took nearly a year to heal. I had to take care of him while he recovered. That was the first of the many curveballs life threw at us. Then, we graduated college with no job prospects due to the economic recession. I worked three part-time jobs, while he fell into a terrible depression that lasted eight months. We moved cities and continents, four times within three years, with each move more stressful than the last. We

fought with our families—often.

Then, I had a death on my side of the family, which uprooted us yet again to a different country—an impulsive decision that paid off in the long run. After the death of this family member, I suffered from depression for nearly a year, while my husband pulled it together and started his career. While everyone else around us was travelling, getting married and having children, we were just starting out. We worked and worked, we budgeted and stayed home and, five years later, we were finally able to pay for our wedding—so at last we said “I do”.

Then I got pregnant and fell so sick for the entire nine months that I had to completely stop working. We had our child and the



upheavals continued! As I reflect on the past decade, there have been so many ups and downs already that I wonder what the next 10 years will bring or even the next 60 years... Keeping our marriage alive through all of these external struggles has definitely been a test of commitment for me and my husband.

Making your own happy ending

The truth is that there is no such thing as 'happily ever after'. Things like job security, money, family, death, anxiety, moving and health can all affect your marriage. To add to those, you will be going through moments of different personal interests and common everyday disagreements. Certain stressors can affect their behaviour and moods, and you never know how long these periods will last. So yes, sometimes it may be hard to be with your spouse.

I tend to look at marital problems as a way of life, telling me that a certain area requires my attention. If I am having a hard time with my spouse, I take it as an indicator that I need to work harder at my marriage by introspecting, ever so gently. Sometimes life shoves couples on a whirlwind, away from each other. And being married for life—it is YOUR job to find your way back to each other and reconnect.

Here's what you can do:

Remember why you got together in the first place

Even in the hardest times, you must get back to the source; that is, the way you used to be in the good old days. Remember what qualities attracted you to your spouse, even if they are now shrouded. Remember why you fell in love with her and the beautiful things she used to do. Reminisce—together if you can.

Spend quality time

I once read somewhere that an average couple only spends seven minutes of quality time together per day. Work and looking after the kids can distract you from your bonding time. Take the opportunity to look for moments of your togetherness where you can improve your reconnection. This could even be as

simple as sharing a meal together and asking your partner how their day was. Or, when you are going to bed, turn off all devices and just be there with them. Spending quality time is all about giving your undivided attention to your partner.

Physical touch

There is nothing like physical touch to unite a couple because, in tough situations, sometimes there are just no words to say. A quick kiss as you go out of the door, a hug before bed, or even just an old-fashioned handholding does wonders.

Date nights

Never stop making the effort to date and woo your partner. Set up a weekly date night like going for dinner and a movie on a certain day of the week and stick to it—don't cancel, even if you have been arguing. Spending quality time together will reconnect you faster, and more frequently.

No 'problem' talk

Everyone will say that you should communicate with your spouse, but you shouldn't overdo it. If you are having issues, briefly speak of them and then give it a rest, do not nag them about it. You should not pollute your quality time with talking about all your problems, all the time.

Take time for yourself

Sometimes the best way to take the pressure off your marriage is to spend time with yourself so that you could work on 'you'. In a marriage, it is so easy to give-give-give to the other person that you unconsciously start to resent them. You also need to ask yourself what you are bringing to the table for yourself and take an inventory of your needs.

No marriage is immune to life's strains. In a long term partnership, you have to be able to ride the waves in the good times and the bad. Then you can weather any storm that comes upon you.



Alexandra Madhavan

is a writer and photographer living in Vancouver. She writes on intercultural relationships, parenting, travel, and wellbeing. For more about her visit madh-mama.blogspot.ca



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■ By Phoebe Hutchison

LIVING WITH A DEPRESSED spouse is full of challenges; some people feel cheated by the changes in their spouse's actions and attitudes, others feel heartbroken and many become emotionally disconnected, eventually ending the relationship. As a relationship and crisis counsellor, I've helped many couples whose lives were impacted by depression. Allow me to shed light on the signs of a depressed partner, give you a glimpse inside their world and outline contributing factors for depression, which will equip you both with the strategies to improve your relationship and your lives, despite depression.

Life with a depressed partner



What are the signs of a depressed spouse?

Has your partner changed and become negative, often pessimistic, about almost everything? Has he or she become quieter, emotionally withdrawn, simultaneously making themselves unavailable for many family activities? Have they cut down on socialising and seem disinterested in work, family and life? Have they increased emotional eating, alcohol intake or drug usage? Has your partner become moody and is easily angered? One client said, "My husband seems to be a shell—as if he has no soul," and another said, "He's no fun anymore; he's just not the same person he was five years ago, before the depression." One woman said, "He's always angry." One man said, "My wife is constantly sad, and hardly talks, yet she has so many great things in her life." These sentiments are common. While the contributing factors in depression vary from person to person, the way depression appears 'from the outside' is strikingly similar.

How does it feel to be the depressed spouse?

The daily walk with depression is a crippling one; relationships with self, family members, friends, colleagues and life in general, all become more difficult and painful. The depressed spouse usually feels oppressed and caged in, either by self-imposed restrictions or perceived or real external limitations placed on them. In most cases, unresolved grief and loss is at the core of depression. For men, it is often the loss of a relative, job loss or loss of emotional/physical intimacy in the primary relationship. For women it is often the loss of a child or feeling trapped in the primary relationship. He or she lives in the shadow of self-condemnation, anger and frustration. As they over-focus on their defeats and weaknesses, causing their self-esteem to plummet, they compare themselves with others unfavourably—adding more bricks to the wall of isolation around them. This

anger at life eventually points inwards, as prior goals seem unattainable. They feel pressured by most obligations, leaving them feeling 'stuck', struggling to make decisions, and fearful of the future. This lack of fulfilment, and a feeling that life is 'bland', sometimes becomes the catalyst for a 'mid-life crisis' or an affair; creating a change, then a temporary spark. However, a devastating backlash of increased alienation from their spouse, self-disgust and confusion make matters worse. All these negative, repetitive thoughts create an avalanche of sad emotions, impacting the body. As depression sets in, restless sleep, reduced sex drive, impaired sexual function, appetite changes, aches and fatigue are common. Feeling numb and disassociated from life, it is common to hear a depressed person say things like, "I don't know who I am anymore" and "I don't know what I want."

How can you help your depressed spouse?

Some partners tell their spouse to 'harden up' or 'get over it', which only exasperates the situation. Ideally, if your partner has depression, you can assist them by encouraging them to see a psychologist or counsellor for therapy or a doctor for medication. Keep talking to your spouse and keep listening: avoid nasty 'put down' comments. Depression is not just 'in the mind', but is physical as well, be gentle and assist where you can in practical ways around the household. Being empathetic is important, but knowing *strategies* is essential. I have a tool that I encourage you to use. It's called *The Crisis Wheel*.

Ask your spouse how they are doing in the following areas:

- » **Thought Patterns:** *Are they predominantly positive or negative?*
- » **Self Esteem:** *Do they have strong self-esteem?*
- » **Past Grief and loss:** *Are they frequently emotional over a past loss?*
- » **Emotions:** *Are they mostly experiencing positive emotions?*

Phoebe Hutchison is the author of *Are You Listening? Life Is Talking to You and Honeymooners Forever: Twelve Step Marriage Survival Guide*. She has worked extensively with couples and clients in crisis. Reach her at www.honeymoonersforever.com.au or www.areyoulistening.com.au



- » **Brain chemistry:** *Are they eating well and exercising at least three times weekly to improve brain neurotransmitters?*
- » **Support networks:** *Do they have friends they regularly socialise with?*
- » **Passions:** *Are they enjoying passions/hobbies?*
- » **Lifestyle/Career:** *Do they enjoy their day job and are they suffering any financial stress?*

When using this Crisis Wheel for assessment, I ask the client to give me a 'coping' or 'not coping', response, which I translate to a tick or a cross. In my book I offer strategies for these eight vital areas. Ask your spouse how they are coping in these areas. Tragically, a person who is not coping in five or more of these areas is likely to be experiencing suicidal thinking, so be brave and ask them if they have had any suicidal thoughts. Other signs to watch for that your spouse may be suicidal are: Do they feel hopeless, are they saying goodbyes, giving away possessions, putting legal affairs in order, or frequently talking about dying?

How medicine and therapy can help

Science suggests that depression is related to an imbalance in the levels of the following neurotransmitters in the brain: serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine, and that depression can be hereditary. So, does depression cause the reduction in these neurotransmitters or does the reduction in the neurotransmitters cause depression? It is much like the chicken and the egg—which came first? Regardless, it is crucial that a person with depression has improved power over thoughts, emotions, and relationships, and to do this, therapy and strategies are required. When a person is coping well in most areas in their life, depression symptoms usually subside. Your doctor can assist with antidepressant medication, which often works well in improving the balance of neurotransmitters.

Overall, you need to work on two levels:

- A. Keep these brain chemistry levels correct and
- B. Equip the depressed spouse with strategies for coping with their relationship and life.

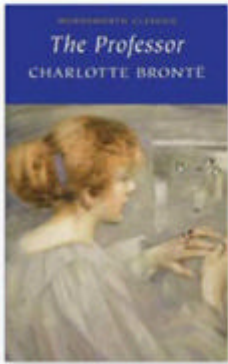
Many of my hundreds of counselling sessions have involved a client with depression. When you know what to look for, what you can do to help, what to avoid doing and the psychological strategies for improvement, you can make a huge change in your partner's life, the relationship and your life. Keep talking, keep listening and keep connected to each other. Now that you know more about what your partner is going through, and that depression is an illness, not a choice, this should help you stay empathetic. Use therapeutic strategies, have hope, and support each other, through sickness and in health.



The love of my life

“For better or for worse” is an oft uttered phrase but rarely put into practice. The central characters of our selection show us that the love of our significant other can aid us through even our darkest hours

BOOKS



The Professor [Fiction]

By Charlotte Brontë

William Crimsworth, an educated and intelligent young man, is offered a job in the girls' school run by Mlle. Reuter. Just as he starts to feel attracted towards Mlle. Reuter, his heart is broken when he overhears her speaking to another man about their upcoming marriage. Mlle. Reuter later offers William the opportunity to tutor one of her young teachers, Frances. However, when William and Frances fall in love, Mlle. Reuter is jealous. She dismisses Frances and hides her address from William. Desolate, William leaves the school with the hope of finding Frances. What happens next? Well, suffice to say that this is a love story with a very happy ending.

“That to begin with; let respect be the foundation, affection the first floor, love the superstructure.”

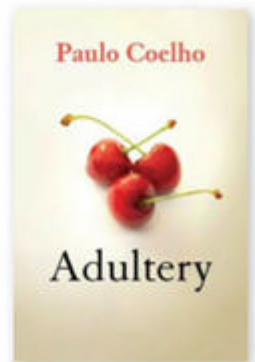
— Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor*

“Today I am a woman torn between the terror that everything might change and the equal terror that everything might carry on exactly the same for the rest of my days.”

— Paulo Coelho, *Adultery*

Adultery [Fiction] By Paulo Coelho

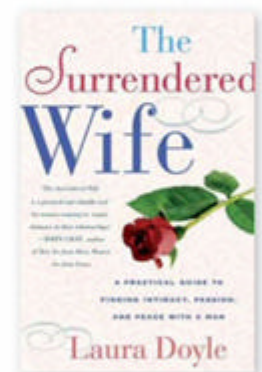
Linda, a beautiful woman in her 30s is blessed with the ideal life—a loving and wealthy husband, well-behaved children and a career as a highly regarded journalist. However, deep inside she is empty and bored. All this changes when she meets her ex-boyfriend Jacob, who is now a successful politician, for an interview. Her need to feel something leads her to have an affair with Jacob. She continues her secret liaison despite the consequences of her promiscuous actions gnawing at the back of her mind. She realises that if she needs to live the ‘perfect’ life, she needs to come clean to her husband; but will he take her back?



“My loneliness was so acute I was willing to try anything. I went to therapy, where I learnt that I often used control as a defence.”

The Surrendered Wife: A Practical Guide To Finding Intimacy, Passion and Peace [Non-fiction] By Laura Doyle

Laura Doyle wants to better her marriage and so she tries everything to make her husband more romantic, helpful and ambitious. But her efforts go in vain, leaving her exhausted and lonely. In her desperation to fall in love with her man again, she decides to surrender her control over him. Surprisingly, her tactic of letting go works. Laura finds the man who had once ardently wooed her is back! This book is a step-by-step guide to finding peace, intimacy and building your dream marriage.



FILMS

Say anything [1989]

Lloyd Dobler is an average student and aspiring kick-boxer who attempts to have a romantic liaison with Diane Court, the highly intelligent class valedictorian. Diane is socially awkward, but intrigued by Lloyd's nature and enthusiasm, she agrees to go on a date with him. One date soon blossoms into a relationship, much to the dismay of her over-possessive father Jim. Upset that she is dating an underachiever, Jim forces her to end her relationship with Lloyd. In the meanwhile, Jim is being investigated by the Internal Revenue Service for alleged tax violations. Caught in the middle of tumultuous events, Diane is torn between her love for her father and her affections for Lloyd.



When a man loves a woman [1994]

Alice Green is a loving person but she has a drinking problem. After having an accident which endangers her as well as her daughters, she and her husband Michael decide to get her professional help. During her stint in rehab, Michael becomes the sole caretaker and struggles to manage his family and his job. When Alice returns, she works on rebuilding her once shattered bond with her children. Michael, used to being the stable one, finds it difficult to adjust to Alice's new lifestyle and finally moves out. When they bump into each other, Alice asks Michael if he will attend her 180-day sober speech but he tells her that he has been offered a job in Denver. This is a touching movie about overcoming life's hardships.

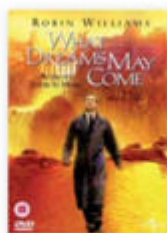


"My wife is an alcoholic... best person I ever met. She has 600 different smiles. They can light up your life. They can make you laugh out loud, just like that. They can even make you cry, just like that. That's just with her smiles. You'd have to see her with her kids. You have to see how they look at her, when she's not looking. To think of all the things she lives through, and I couldn't help her."

— Michael Green

What dreams may come [1998]

Chris and Annie meet on a trip to Switzerland and fall in love. Soon thereafter, they get married and have two kids, Ian and Marie. They live an ideal existence, until they lose their kids in a car collision. The accident leaves Chris and Annie distraught. Together they overcome the trauma. However, after a couple of years Chris dies in a car accident. Annie is unable to cope with his loss and commits suicide. Chris who is in heaven realises that he is unhappy without Annie and finds a tracker to search for Annie's soul. What dreams may come is a riveting tale which portrays that the love of soul-mates can transcend the depths of heaven and hell.



Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind [2004]

Joel Barish and Clementine Kruczynski are in love and everything seems to be perfect, until the day things between them turn sour and they end their relationship. Joel discovers that his ex-girlfriend Clementine underwent a procedure to erase all the memories of their relationship from her brain and decides to get the same thing done, hoping that it will take away his pain and sadness. However, as he relives the memories while they are being erased, he realises that he has had some lovely moments with her and doesn't want to lose those. Directed by Michael Gondry, this movie depicts that love can survive the toughest circumstances.



Raise them without prejudice

Raising your kids in an atmosphere
free of any gender-bias will help them
grow to their best potential

■ By Ankita Khanna



I STILL REMEMBER A time not so long ago when my five-year-old nephew had developed a fascination for all things supposedly 'girly'. He loved the colour pink, and everything that sparkled. When the other kids played ball around us, he would want to practise braiding the hair of all the ladies in the house in the most creative ways. He went to a ballet class where he was the only boy and there he shone like a star.

He is seven now, and though his love for ballet has faded, *Nutcracker* still remains his most watched film. He goes to a jazz class with both boys and girls, and enjoys running around and rough and tumble play in the park. He doesn't volunteer to braid our hair as often, but still makes the most astute observations about our change of hairstyle or dressing.

He is also the most sensitive and emotionally perceptive little boy I know. Being raised by parents who have never felt the need to raise their boys as 'feminists' or 'footballers', but simply left them free to explore the possibilities between those or any other categories, he is finding his own place in the world.

Just as news of gender-based violence and discrimination bombards us in the most disturbing ways, so does a combative wave of protest against it, ensuring that a narrative of antidote also exists in parallel. For every 'objectifying' statement made about women, one also hears its 'liberating' polar opposite. For each time a man commits violence against a woman, there is an exhortation to men everywhere to 'man up' to being respectful and sensitive.

But how do young minds make sense of these two extreme positions and arrive at the one they wish to live by? And how do parents find their own sense of balance between 'politically correct' and comfortable parenting around these sensitive issues?

Here are some things you can do to sensitise your children to gender equality in your day-to-day routine:

» **Watch out for stereotypes.** Have you ever told your son that he needs to 'protect' his sister because 'she is a girl' or told your daughter that she needs to help lay the table or serve the guests because she is a girl? Buying dolls for the girls and cars for the boys, or doing up their rooms in girly or boyish ways are stereotypic overloads children could do well without. Right from infancy, raise your children in an atmosphere of curiosity and freedom. Allow them to explore possibilities,

identities and choices as they grow up, without them having to fear being judged.

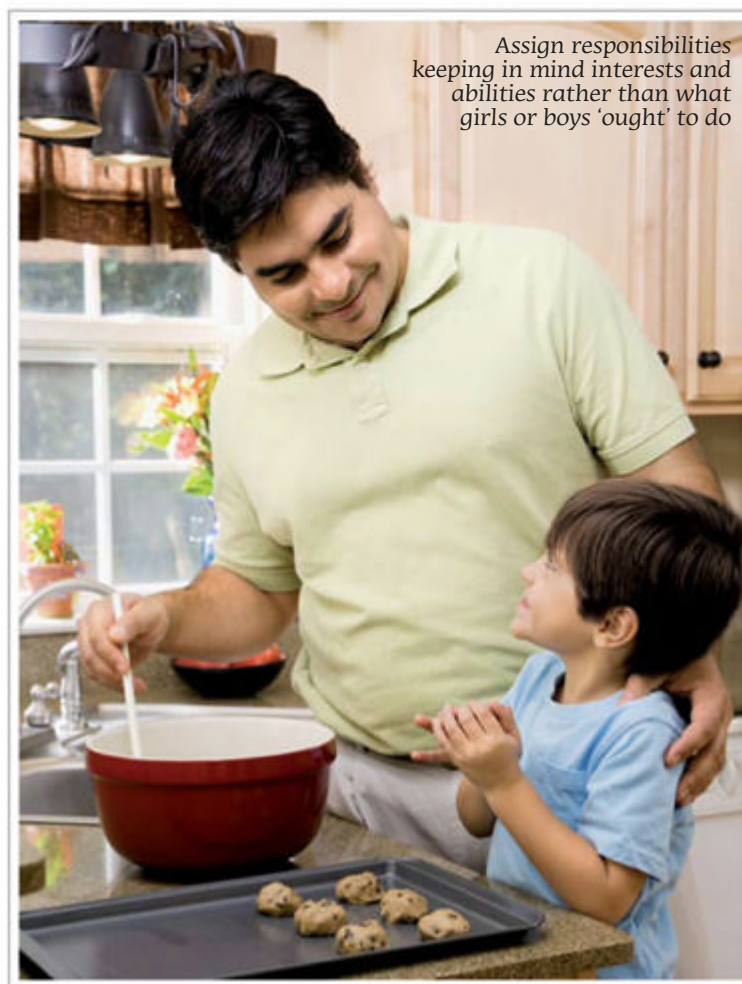
» **Subtle ways in which you may be creating a gender bias in your child.**

While narrating bedtime stories, be mindful to avoid gender stereotypes such as princesses in need of protection by the prince and the princess repaying the favour by marrying the prince. And let them pick up toys from both the 'girls' or 'boys' sections.

» **Teach them to question gender roles in the world around them.** Why do you think the character in this movie made that choice? What could be the consequences of such a choice, for themselves and others? Could there be another choice he/she could have made? The next time they express a wish to 'keep the girls out of it' or buy that blue Kinder Joy™ instead of the pink one, ask them why they want to make that choice, and help them see another perspective.

» **Model it!** Most of what children pick up comes from what they see around them. If they see their parents share chores in an atmosphere of understanding and fairness, the message they get is that this is how it is done. If your children notice that it's normal for their father to shop for vegetables or cook a meal while their mother is comfortable with fixing a broken thing, it helps to dissolve gender biases in their mind.

» **Make sure responsibilities are given keeping interests and abilities in mind, rather than being based on what girls or boys 'ought' to do.** If your little girl enjoys cooking and baking, by all means encourage her to try her hand at it, and if your son is good with electronic repairs, let him enjoy the responsibility. But if your son enjoys playing with your daughter's doll house don't lose sleep over it. Let them know that they are free to experiment with the other role as and when they like.



Assign responsibilities keeping in mind interests and abilities rather than what girls or boys 'ought' to do

» **And finally, remember that promoting equality irrespective of gender, caste, skin colour or economic status, may be more important than promoting equality based on gender alone.** Men and women are different, not necessarily equal in every way, just as no two people are or can be equal in every way. But that difference does not warrant discrimination. That is the message to focus on.

Among us are women who are great drivers and mountain climbers, men who are amazing chefs and have an impressive sense of design, and perhaps what allowed each of them to be all they wanted to be, is someone who believed in their worthiness as people, not as men or women. Let us raise our children in this spirit then, where we value them for who they are and not how well they fit into defined categories.

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Help your child cope with the bullies

Children who are repeatedly bullied may experience severe emotional trauma that can erode their self-esteem and impair mental health. **Chetna Mehrotra** tells you how to know if your child is getting bullied and what to do about it

IN OCTOBER 2013 a man who lived in Illinois received a phone call that no parent would ever want to receive. His ex-wife was on the phone. Their 15-year-old son shot himself in the chest. His suicide note stated bullying at school as the reason he took his life. The same year, a 12-year-old girl jumped from an abandoned factory roof due to being constantly hammered by a bunch of girls, reports *The Los Angeles Times*.

Thousands of kids skip school everyday due to the fear of bullying. Recent trends suggest that bullying has become more frequent and aggressive than before and is affecting younger children too. In addition, the viciousness of deeds increases with age.



What is bullying?

If your child is bullied, it means that one or more students are intentionally hurting her or him. Bullying can be verbal, physical, and emotional. The bullied child feels mentally tortured and pushed into a corner by his or her own peers. A few rogue school kids pick on their weaker fellows and frighten them into submission and all this is done for fun.

They might be getting bullied because of weight issues, the colour of their skin, being slow at sprints, lazy at math, an unusual speaking accent or family issues, which may be known in school. Bullying could also be in the form of rumours about the child, leaving him or her out of group activities or leading to breaking up their friendships, name-calling etc.

If not contained, the child can either go into a permanent shell or explode when the breaking point arrives.

Is my child being bullied?

If your child frequently comes up with excuses in the morning to avoid going to school, it could be due to fear of being bullied. Is your child coming home from school with mysterious cuts, bruises and scrapes? Is she losing her money, lunch box, pencils and other supplies? Do you notice any abnormal changes in your child's behaviour? Any of these could indicate that your child might be fighting a silent and lonely battle with bullies.

What can a parent do?

The first thing a parent can do is to acknowledge that their child is facing a problem. Most kids don't tell adults that they're being bullied, so the onus of getting to the bottom of it is on you.

Asking them the right questions is important. Instead of asking them why their shirt is dirty and torn, ask them if there's something bothering them and if they'd like to confide? Be gentle and assure them of your love and protection, no matter what. If you suspect that your child is reticent about the matter with you, get a trusted adult to speak to them. Some children feel more comfortable confiding in someone who is not from the immedi-

ate family. Let them open up with somebody from the pool of people you know.

Once you discover the issue, take it up with your child's teachers. Be prepared for the possibility that teachers won't know about it. Bullies are clever to not carry out their misdeeds in front of anyone who has the authority to get them punished. That's why, lashing out at teachers for not being aware is not advisable. Let them know that you wanted to bring to the administration's attention what your child is facing. Let the teachers sort it at the school level, while you help your child at an emotional level.

If your child continues to behave differently even after your efforts, or if your instinct tells you that something is wrong, don't think twice before seeking the help of a child psychologist.

Can I prepare my child to face bullies?

If children can be prepared for school exams and competitive sports, they can also be made ready to deal with peer harassment. Bullies thrive on the lack of retaliation by their victims. Your child can learn the right way to tackle bullying from experts who conduct sessions on the subject. Look out for these sessions in your city and sign up your child to attend them. If possible, accompany your child to the programme.

As an anti-bullying evangelist, I loved the *Be a Star* initiative taken by World Wrestling Entertainment where the WWE superstars have formed an anti-bullying alliance. They encourage children to stand up against bullying regardless of whether it happens to them or somebody else. Everyone who knows about the WWE will know how popular this show is among children. And this initiative has made a lot of children come out and raise their voice against bullying.

Can we put an end to the menace?

Speaking to your kids about the bullying will help them know when they or someone else is being victimised. So that the next time they see it happening at school, in the playgrounds, or at home, they are able



Chetna Mehrotra is a certified image consultant. She specialises in appearance, behaviour, communications, and works with individuals, organisations and educational institutes. She runs a kid's workshop 'Life Factory' in Mumbai. It is a unique life-skills learning module for kids between 8 – 14 years of age.

Bullied children suffer silently, so the onus on finding out what's happening is on their parents

to stop it right there—or report it to the concerned authority. Once enough awareness is created at home and school, and children are encouraged to speak up, bullying can end. On the other side of the equation, counselling the bullies about the consequences of their behaviour will go a long way in checking the problem.

As a drama-based therapist, I run anti-bullying programmes in various schools. Every

school that I have visited reveals 4 – 5 cases of bullying on an average. A touching example came my way during one of the drama classes attended by children of standard five. In one of our drama-for-learning session, the students spoke about their experiences based on the emotions the activity triggered. While few of them shared their experiences, I saw a hand half up in the air. This was a boy who never spoke; he would just enjoy the drama activity.

Sharad [name changed], came up and started speaking. It was then that I realised that he stammered. He spoke about the excruciating pain he feels when his classmates and students of other classes tease him for his stammering trait. He cried. When he spoke, another boy raised his hand and came up to speak. Anuj [name changed] said how he was teased by his classmates for a skin condition called eczema. The bullies teased Sharad and Anuj because they were different in some way from others and therefore were not considered normal.


Listening to their painful story brought tears to everyone else in the class—tears of realisation, of empathy, of love. This was a moment of catharsis.

In the next class, we spoke about 'feelings' associated with 'being bullied' and 'bullying someone'. We exchanged views on how the victim can handle his emotions and not take the incident personally, so that it does not hamper his self-esteem. Surprisingly, the bullies of the class confessed to having bullied Anuj and Sharad. We then counselled them on the repercussions of bullying and the difference between occasional teasing vs. bullying.

Kids, at times do not realise that what they are doing could harm someone's life. The child who is bullying is also having some unmet needs being fulfilled in an unnatural way. He too needs guidance and hand-holding.



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Yoga for the busy

Try these five simple yoga *asanas* that you can do during a busy workday to relieve stress

■ By Esther Ekhart

HERE ARE A FEW quick and easy yoga-inspired exercises for your eyes, neck and shoulders. They are perfect if you spend long hours in front of the computer, or carry out any concentrated activity like reading or sewing. These exercises take less than 10 minutes, and you can even split them up over the day.

You can do these exercises at your desk. Before you begin, mentally take a break from work, spin your chair around and turn your computer screen off. If you can, get the whole office involved—it's the best way to stop your colleagues from distracting you and you will not feel self-conscious!

Warm up

Before you start [and you can do this regularly during the day] simply roll your shoulders forwards a few times and then back in the other direction. Then sit up straight so that your spine is nice and long—without losing the natural arches in your back [you don't need to look like an army officer]. Turn your head to face slowly to one side and then the other. Be

aware of where you feel any tightness and be mindful not to overstretch. It's normal to have more stiffness on one side of the body than the other. This can be especially noticeable if you do a lot of work using the mouse.

Gomukhasana [Cow face arms, clock watching]

Bring your arms out to the side, parallel with the floor and then rotate your right arm—so that your palm faces behind you and your thumb is pointing to the floor. Bring that arm around your back and place the back of the palm onto your spine as high-up as is comfortable. It might not be very high up—don't worry!

Then, bring your left arm up pointing to the sky and bend it at the elbow so that your left hand comes to meet your right hand. If your hands reach, clasp your hands. If not, you can hold on to your clothes or make use of a yoga strap or a scarf. This can really help to release tension in the shoulders and the front of the chest.

Esther Ekhart is the founder of Ekhart Yoga and has been a yoga teacher for over 20 years. In her classes she provides a wonderful mix of practicing the asanas and teaching the philosophical aspects of yoga. To find out more please visit www.ekhartyoga.com.

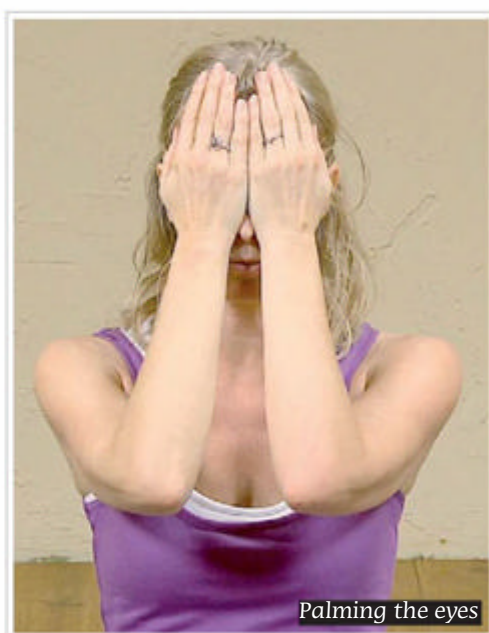


Pics: EkhartYoga

While your arms are in this position focus on a spot ahead of you and then imagine you are looking at a big clock. Without moving your head, look up to 12 o'clock and then down to six o'clock—repeat this about 10 times.

Palming the eyes

Bring your hands together and rub your palms against one another until they feel warm. Loosely cup your hands and place



them lightly over your closed eyes. I recommend you do this palming exercise several times a day every day. Even if this is the only exercise you do you will really feel the benefits of letting the eyes completely relax. It is important for you to do this a few times in between the other exercises. This technique is ideal to relax your eyes whenever you are doing work that needs you to focus closely on objects.

After you've relaxed your eyes, repeat exercise one [Gomukhasana] but this time rotate your left arm and raise your right arm over your head to meet it. With your arms in this position, look at the clock again. This time look right over to three o'clock and then all the way to your left to nine o'clock. Repeat this movement 10 times and then hold your warm palms over your eyes again.

Remember it's perfectly normal if one side feels differently than the other.

Garudasana [Eagle arms, clock watching]

To do this exercise, hold your arms out to each side and cross your right arm over your left and bend your elbows. If you can, wrap your forearms and bring your palms together. If not, just leave your arms crossed. Keep your shoulders low and the elbows lifted.





Then repeat the eye exercise, this time look up and right to two o'clock on your imaginary clock and then down and left to eight o'clock. Do this 10 times [if you get confused, you can perform the movement by imagining that you are looking at the diagonally opposite corners of a square].

After you finish the 10 repetitions, rub the palms of your hands together and hold them over your eyes again. Now change the position by having your left arm come over your right and move your eyes from 10 o'clock to four o'clock [left upper corner to right bottom corner].

Change your focus

When you are working at a computer or tablet or doing any concentrated work like reading, drawing and sewing, you have your focus fixed in one position for a long time. Perhaps you might even squint or frown as you try to read the text or work on the fine details.

This exercise can help moisten the eyes and relax the muscles in the eyes and face. This is especially good for those who tend to spend a little too much time on their phones! Remember to blink a lot too. Some say that doing this regularly can improve your eyesight, but even if it doesn't, at the very least it



will help your eyes to get rid of the tiredness!

This exercise is simple! Hold your index finger up in front of you and focus on it for a few seconds. Then look away and focus on a point further away from you for a few seconds. Repeat this a few times. Follow this movement by holding your warm palms over your eyes.

Neck stretcher

This is a really nice way for you to stretch your neck and upper shoulders. Sit up tall and clasp your hands behind your back, palms together and your fingers interlaced. Bend your elbows and bring your hands towards the left side of your waist. Then gently tilt your head to the left. There should be no strain while you are doing this, just a gentle release. Hold this for a few seconds and now do this on the right side. Repeat this 10 times, alternating between each side.

So there you go—five easy and quick exercises to combat computer tension and keep your eyes, neck and shoulders healthy. And these can all be performed from the comfort of your work desk!



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Bring your sleep back on track

Falling asleep can be quite a task for many. **Leo Babauta** shares some of the most common reasons for insomnia and ways to overcome them

SLEEP PROBLEMS CAN be a major drag on happiness—if you can't sleep well, you can't function as well during the day.

It's tough being tired all day. I've had days where I struggled to make it through the day and didn't have the energy to tackle anything that matters.

Hell, I've had years like that.

When you're tired, not much seems appealing. Life is dulled, and you don't get much accomplished. Worse still, you don't have the energy to change the situation.

These days I don't have many days like this, but when I do, I rest. We have gotten good at ignoring our body's signals—much of our lives are spent training our minds to pretend as if our bodies aren't tired, so we can be more productive.

This is wrong. It ends up in burnout and reduced productivity, because we inevitably run out of energy. Listen to your body—your long-term health and sanity depend on it.

Why we are tired

We are exhausted because we don't rest enough. We think rest is not as important as other things like waking early, getting stuff done, attending a thousand meetings, being sucked into the world of online connections, reading and of course watching our all-important TV programmes.

So we cut down on our sleep in favour of these other things that are much more essential, and then wonder why our energy levels are low.

Sleep problems

Let's take a quick look at some of the problems that keep people tossing in bed:

Not tired yet: If your sleeping pattern is set so that you usually sleep later, when you do attempt to go to bed earlier, you're not tired enough to fall asleep.

Too tired: It's possible to be so exhausted that falling asleep is difficult. This tends to be a problem less often than 'not tired enough' though.

Worries: You've got something spinning around in your head, so the sleep doesn't come. Sometimes it's replaying something that's happened, or things that someone said, and at other times it's worrying about something coming up or planning an event.

Electronic devices: If you're using your computer, smartphone, tab or any other device in bed, you might be tired but have a hard time sleeping because your mind isn't unwinding.

There are other issues, but I've found these to be the most common.

Formula for becoming a baby

So how do we solve these problems and sleep like babies? I don't have all the answers, but let me share some of the things that have worked for me.

Exercise: A good hard workout or run, bike or swim will get you nice and tired. A good yoga workout is a wonderful way to exercise, as you learn mindfulness at the same time. Even if my workout is early in the day, I often go to bed with a tired body, and look forward to the rest. Don't workout right before bed though.

Get up early: You can get your body to shift its sleeping schedule by slowly getting up earlier. Try 15 minutes earlier than normal for a week, then another 15 minutes. If you get up earlier, you'll be a bit tired during the day, and when it's time to go to sleep, you'll enjoy the rest.

Establish a bedtime ritual: It takes time to unwind the body and mind. At least an hour before bedtime, start slowing down. Turn off the computer, TV or smartphone. Floss and brush your teeth. Put away things you were using in the evening. Sit down and read a book [not on your laptop]. This kind of ritual helps establish in your mind that it's time to sleep, and your body takes this cue and begins to prepare itself.

Keep your room only for sleeping: Don't eat, watch TV, use your computer, or do other kinds of activities in your room. Restrict those

activities to the living and dining rooms, so that when you go to bed, there's just one thing to do. Be sure to make the room dark when you go to sleep too—your body reacts to light.

Focus your attention: Once you've gone through your bedtime ritual and unwound, and your body is nice and tired, you need to quiet your mind. Here's my trick for doing that—close your eyes and visualise the first thing you did today. That might be opening your eyes and getting out of bed. Then visualise the second thing you did—let's say you washed your face or drank a glass of water. Then you started the coffee but first had to grind the beans. Visualise these tiny steps in detail. I never get past the first hour of my day before I'm asleep.

Change slowly: Be patient with sleeping changes—they are difficult, because when you are tired, your mind doesn't have the discipline to stick to changes. Your body and mind want to do what it's used to doing. But if you change a little at a time, and forgive yourself for 'messing up' [there's no messing up, actually], then you can make changes.

This cure for insomnia didn't work overnight for me. But I don't think it took that long before it did begin to work. You can only go without adequate sleep for so long before your body and mind force you to catch up. So catch up by going to sleep earlier.

Another thing I noticed was that when I began to sleep earlier and wake earlier, it threw my sleeping patterns off for a while. It was a bit weird and took a little while to adjust, but finally getting a good night's rest was rewarding.

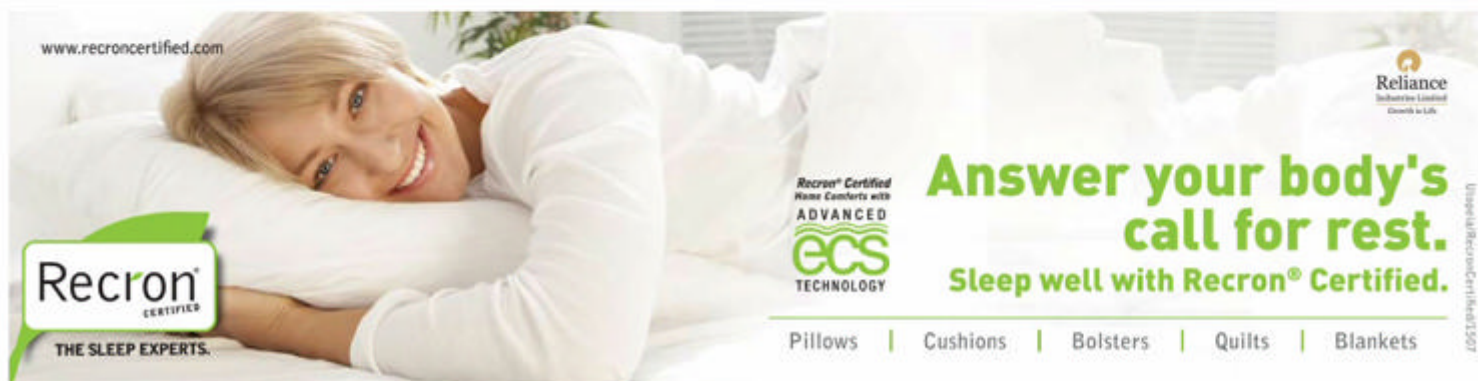


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WOMEN @40

Menopause is a time of great change in a woman's life and it's important that she and her loved ones be prepared for it

■ By Rishma Dhillon Pai



No matter what your age, stress can affect you. Whether it's a student worried about an exam, an employee worried about meeting a deadline, or a woman affected by the sudden changes in her body—everyone worries. But women over 40 years are more prone to stress and anxiety. Midlife issues such as menopause, caring for ageing parents, career changes, children leaving home and financial setbacks make ageing women the perfect target for stress related problems. Anxiety, depression and mood swings are few of the first signs of perimenopausal transitions. Let's take a look at each of them more closely.

Anxiety

There are many emotional factors particular to perimenopause that can contribute to anxiety. When perimenopause hits, a woman is likely to suffer from anxiety as well as depression. Anxiety is a mental state where you worry too much—sometimes persistently—are nervous and tense. You can't seem to shake off your concerns and worries about everyday events even though you know that your anxiety is unjustified. You can have difficulty concentrating and feel restless and irritable, which can sometimes lead to panic attacks. Changes in oestrogen levels have a direct effect on the neurochemicals that regulate mood. Hence, fluctuations in them can lead to anxiety. Other social factors, like worrying about your child's exam results, may worsen this condition. Managing this condition requires a lot of family support and understanding, lifestyle changes and sometimes also medication.

Even for those women who are essentially happy and upbeat, things may change quickly and drastically when perimenopause appears. It's a time of emotional distress.

Because of this, they have more conflicts than usual with the people around them and that creates tension. At this stage, some women even go through a difficult time with their husbands sexually, which further aggravates anxiety. The problem may also be aggravated by caffeine, stress, thyroid problems, or heart disease.

Anxiety leads to palpitations or rapid heartbeats. It is a good idea to visit a physician and have a thorough check-up done if the heartbeat is faster than 100 beats per minute. If all your tests are normal, try yoga and relaxation techniques and avoid caffeine, colas, smoking and alcohol—these steps will help reduce episodes of palpitations.

Depression

Women over the age of 40 go through a lot of changes that can give rise to depression in them. This doesn't mean that every woman over 40 will get depressed. But if your life was already stressful, the physical and emotional changes that typically accompany menopause may send you into a full-blown state of depression.

Depressive illness can make you feel exhausted, worthless, helpless and hopeless, and sometimes you may just want to give up. Women often suppress their need of autonomy, neglect their health, and fail to equip with skills, competence and self-confidence.

They may experience sadness, crying spells, sleeplessness or excessive fatigue, lack of interest in surroundings, neglect of self and

display other signs of depression which may be as serious as suicide attempts. Treatment consists of lifestyle changes, exercise, yoga, support from family and friends and often anti-depressant drugs.

Mood fluctuations

Frequent mood change is the most common symptom of perimenopause. As a teenager, some of you may have cried at the drop of a hat. As a woman in your 30s PMS made you bite your best friend's head off when she asked you how your day went. Or remember that feeling of wanting to punch someone because they just wouldn't shut up when you told them to? Well, that feeling is going to come back to you when you least expect it, in circumstances that may at times be classified as volatile. We'd all like to keep these episodes to a minimum, but perimenopause can sometimes make that seem like an impossible challenge. Perimenopause shares many of these symptoms with PMS. The difference is that PMS lasts only for one week, once a month, but perimenopause can last anywhere from 1 to 10 years. It's no wonder that the overriding emotion women in their 40s feel is that of being overwhelmed.

And because you have to train yourself to cope with these feelings, perimenopause also results in a pretty drastic change in a woman's personality. There are days when you don't really know what is happening with you. You'll find yourself annoyed by things that you never even noticed. I have had patients who are very disturbed by the changes that are taking place because they're shocked by the fierceness of their irritability and the sharpness of their mood swings. Wild mood swings and increased irritability are linked to the sudden shifts in hormonal balance. These fluctuations in the levels of oestrogen, testosterone, and progesterone can occur when your body doesn't get the right kind of support to maintain a natural balance. Sometimes, mood swings can take you high and you feel intense joy in everything around you. At other times, however, they can take you on a downhill



Appearance becomes a confidence-booster during menopause



Rishma Dhillon
Pai is a Mumbai based gynaecologist. She and her husband Dr Hrishikesh Pai have had the fortune of treating thousands of infertile couples to help them have their own child.

ride with emotions such as sadness, anger, despair, anxiety, or fear.

A mental shift

40s are a time when many women find themselves at the peak of their career. While the 20s were spent trying to climb the ladder of success, the 30s were about consolidating your presence in the workplace. But it's in your 40s, that it all comes together for you. This also means added pressure and stress.

For homemakers too, this is the time when they begin to assert their independence. By this age, a woman realises that time has passed her by and that she now has to make some changes in her life. Many women show a lot more independence now than they ever did. When they were younger, they were dependant on their husband or parents. There's the feeling that they couldn't do much to change their situation because the kids were too young. So if they are not happy in their relationships, this is the time that they assert themselves.

But that assertiveness can have a dark side too. I've noticed that for certain women, this phase brings out a side of their personality that was dormant for several years.

Let me give you an example. My husband and I have been friends with a couple for many years now. Theirs was a love marriage and they have two children who are in their teens. Ever since we've known them, this couple has been very happy. But about three to four years ago, I noticed a change in the attitude of the wife. A woman who for so long was happy to just be known as someone's wife, suddenly was coming into her own. She seemed more confident and was very focused on her appearance. Whenever the two of us would meet for lunch, she'd only talk about how it was important to be your own person and that now she was keen to do things her own way. She had always been slightly plump, but now she was an active member at her gym and exercised regularly. She had become a completely different person from the one I had known for so many years. I was glad that she was happy with the changes she

had made in her life, but was also taken aback by the aggression behind those changes. Soon after, her husband told me that she had been having an affair with a man she met at the gym, and that they were on the verge of separation.

After years and years of making adjustments to live according to how their husbands and in-laws want them to, during their 40s women realise that there's more to life. The realisation that the person they have moulded themselves to be is not what they started out as can be very crushing. And then they feel a need to rebel.

One of the reasons for this is that women in their 40s often have a lot of free time at hand and don't know what to do with it. If you aren't a working woman, you may have a 'vacuum' in your life at this stage. That's why I always encourage women to work. At 25, if you aren't a working woman, you may feel empty when you are older. Starting work at 40, when you have no skills or experience, is not easy! 40s is also the time when women try to reclaim old friends. Indian women tend to lose touch with their school friends after they get married. But suddenly, in their mid-40s, they reconnect with old friends because they have time on their hands. So now, a woman has a social circle of her own that's not dependant on her husband.

That's probably why, as I have observed, a lot of couples experience trouble in their marriage in their 40s. Whether they divorce or not depends on their individual mindsets as well as what their social environment allows them to do.

Anthropologist Margaret Mead said, "There is no greater power in the world than the zest of a menopausal woman." The symptoms you feel through perimenopause ultimately influence your actions and reactions. Don't let these symptoms define you during this stage of your life. The power to help yourself during this time lies with the best person—you.



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Your golden years

For a happy life after retirement, financial planning alone is not enough; you also need to be emotionally and mentally prepared, says **Kathy Merlino**



TYPE 'RETIREMENT PLANNING' INTO any search bar on the internet and you will find hundreds of articles about planning for the financial side of retirement. There's a lot of talk about reaching your financial goals, saving enough for a secure retirement and living your dream. For most people retirement preparation is exactly that—having enough money.

Somehow, we believe all we must do is have enough money and everything else will fall into place. *We believe that retirement means we will be on a perpetual vacation doing all the things we enjoy with no planning necessary to create a fulfilling retirement state of mind.*

Kathy Merlino is the author of *kathysretirementblog.com* where she writes about the emotional and psychological aspects of retirement. Kathy believes retirement takes more than financial preparation and is a journey rather than an arrival at a life destination.



Why retirement requires mental planning too

Recently I spoke to Natasha, a friend of mine, who retired with her husband. They left their jobs, sold their home and moved 2,500 miles to a retirement community, which boasted of restaurants, stores, theatres, golf courses, swimming pools, along with club houses for card games and art classes. There, the couple purchased a new home and relaxed and partied with new friends while they enjoyed the amenities. Then, Natasha confessed, they got bored.

As she related how they got tired of doing the same things every day with the same people, it reminded me of Robert Atchley's study on the stages of retirement. Atchley, a professor of gerontology, identified six stages of retirement—disillusionment is one of them. To sum up his research, retirement is a major life transition where no matter how much we plan financially, we need to do a better job of planning for the emotional and psychological changes brought about by leaving our work lives behind. Mental health in retirement is just as important, if not more, than financial health.

With advances in nutrition and medical care, it is possible for many people to live another 20 to 30 years in retirement. The idea of 20 years of doing nothing but having fun may sound like, well, fun, but realistically it's a formula for a boring life. Work provides many things that enhance our lives, such as challenge, structure to our days and, for most people, a social forum as co-workers and customers become friends. While the workplace may be a top

source of stress for many people, it should come as no surprise when once we retire we miss the engagement with others at the office. In fact, the stress of our job is often replaced by other forms of stress, and sometimes even depression.

One change at a time

Like Natasha who moved 2,500 miles thinking she was going to retirement utopia, some people find themselves stressed over the choices they made. In her case, she left the retirement community, moved back to her old home town, bought another house in her old neighbourhood and took a part-time job as she realised how much she missed her work life, old friends and the community she'd been part of for 30 years. Moving is stressful at any time in life, whether it's for a job transfer or for your retirement. And, as with Natasha's example, when the initial euphoria of retiring is replaced by boredom, there is anxiety over deciding what to do next. Finding new meaning and purpose in life after retirement takes not only thought and introspection, but also a leap of faith.

Things that you need to keep in mind before you retire

1. For retirees, the number one stressor is money. Even if you form a solid financial plan with professional advice, once the pay cheque stops coming in, retirees often feel a tremendous amount of stress. No matter how many financial planners you talk to, there is no guarantee that your money will last your lifetime.

2. Then, there's the spectre of health issues. We all know we will eventually have health issues, body parts will wear out and we won't be able to do as much as we once did. Retirement age is often the time when health issues begin to surface. Even people who retire in excellent health find themselves worrying about potential health issues and, yes, the resulting strain on their finances.
3. Then, there is this seldom-thought-of stressor. Retirees who are married often look forward to finally spending more time together, only to realise that after having spent decades apart all day in the workplace, co-habiting 24x7 is entirely too much time together.

Steps to make the transition smooth

As you enter this potentially exciting time of life, minimising the stress, finding new purpose and meaning and making a successful transition requires advanced planning. Here are four steps to ensure that you are mentally prepared to make a smooth transition to retirement.

1. The first step is recognising there will be an adjustment period, the same way you have adjusted in the past to other major life events like getting married, having children, changing jobs, moving to a new locale or losing a loved one. Retirement is also a major life event; once you acknowledge this fact, you will have an easier time adjusting than those who think there will be no ups and downs.
2. Talk to a counsellor, preferably

The six stages of retirement according to Robert Atchley

Pre-retirement

This point in time is when the person is contemplating the changes that will occur when they leave their job and what they want to do when they retire.

Retirement

At this stage the person engages in what they want to do and plans for the future.

Disenchantment

Some people find adjusting to retirement difficult and discover that it is not what they thought it would be.

Reorientation

After a period of rest and relaxation people take stock of how they can fulfill their dreams.

Retirement routine

This phase consists of living a rewarding life through a fixed schedule. Some are able to do this immediately after leaving the workplace, while others take longer. Once people settle into a routine, this phase can last for many years.

Termination of retirement

When a person can no longer live independently due to illness or disability, retirement in its true sense comes to an end as the person's primary focus shifts to their health.

For more information go to- <http://ohioline.osu.edu/ss-fact/0201.html>

one who specialises in mental health for older adults. Today, there are life coaches who specialise in retirement issues. Seek their advice just as you would a financial counsellor. Your plan for emotional and psychological stability is just as personal as your plan for financial stability. A counsellor can help you focus on what is best for you.

3. Think about the activities you will engage in during your retirement. 20 to 30 years is a long time, long enough for a second

your idea of a great retirement activity, winter is probably the perfect time to retire. But if you are a gardener, planning to start a fruit and vegetable garden in your compound, then you may want to wait for warm weather to arrive before making your exit. And, before you make a major change like selling your house and moving 2,500 miles, remember, by retiring, you are already involved in one major life change. So, try not to do everything at once.



It is important to prepare for your retirement, both financially and emotionally

career after you've had some extended relaxation; long enough to take up and master a new hobby; long enough to make your dent in the universe through volunteer work. This is the time of life to reach for the stars, so become an explorer of yourself.

4. Plan on staying physically active as much as possible and engaging in activities that will keep you engaged with other people. Think about the timing of your exit from work in terms of your hobbies, travel plans and social commitments. If visiting places where it snows is

As human beings, we have an inner need to strive for something greater. That need doesn't dissolve with retirement. We still look for meaning and purpose in our lives. The idea of spending decades doing the same ordinary business day after day instead of finding our true potential is like a slow death. Whether you are planning your retirement or are already in retirement, if you haven't already done so, take steps now to ensure a healthy, fulfilling retirement state of mind.



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INCREASED BLOOD PRESSURE, elevated insulin resistance, excess abdominal fat and high cholesterol levels—by themselves each of these increase your risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes. But when they occur together in an individual, the lethal combination shoots up the risks manifold. This coming together of adverse conditions is known as metabolic syndrome or simply syndrome X. Being overweight and central obesity in particular is a major risk factor for developing metabolic syndrome.

What are the risks associated with metabolic syndrome?

Syndrome X increases your risk of coronary heart disease and stroke by four times, and of developing diabetes by as much as 6 – 8 times. Those with the syndrome are also more likely to suffer from sleep disorders, back pain and joint problems. Women affected by this syndrome are at a higher risk of developing polycystic ovarian disease [PCOD] and infertility.

How common is metabolic syndrome?

In the last decade, this syndrome has become much more common in India. It is estimated that about 30 per cent of adults or one in 3 – 4 adults have it; the syndrome is more common in women than in men.

How is metabolic syndrome diagnosed?

It is diagnosed when a patient has at least three of the following five conditions:

- » Central obesity, which is measured as waist circumference of more than 35 inches in men and more than 32 inches in women
- » Fasting blood triglycerides of more than 150 mg/dL or being on medication for high triglycerides
- » HDL cholesterol levels of less than 40mg/dl in men and less than 50mg/dl in women
- » Blood pressure of more than 130/85 mm Hg or being on medication for high blood pressure
- » Fasting blood sugar of more than 100 mg/dL or being on medication for high blood glucose

How is metabolic syndrome treated?

The best way is to lose weight, increase physical activity and modify your diet. Exercise should be intensified over the time. The 'exercise prescription' should be obtained from a qualified exercise specialist. Daily activity should be encouraged. Abnormal

The X factor

Metabolic syndrome is the result of an unhealthy lifestyle and poor diet choices. But the good news is that it can be reversed

■ By Vimal Pahuja



cholesterol levels may be controlled with medication.

Metabolic surgery is recommended for individuals who are morbidly obese and are unable to lose weight or keep the lost weight off despite repeated attempts. It also helps individuals who are obese and have developed uncontrolled diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease or fertility issues.

If you are suffering from metabolic syndrome, make sure that you:

- » Routinely monitor your body weight [especially abdominal girth]. Also monitor blood glucose, lipoproteins and blood pressure
- » Get treated for high cholesterol, high blood pressure and high blood glucose
- » Adopt an overall healthy lifestyle and take measures to manage your stress.

It's important to focus on all the components of this syndrome for holistic management.



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Family constellations

Explore this therapeutic approach that draws on the effects of your family relationships on your life situation

■ By Anupama Joshi

THREE YEARS AGO, when my family unexpectedly disintegrated, the relationships between the members of the existing fragment of the family became very strained. As a single mother of two young adults, understanding the inner working of their minds became a tumultuous task. At an age when they were on the threshold of adulthood, but still innocent at heart, grappling with such a situation became a painful and energy consuming task for them. They got pulled between their parents and I had no clue how they felt and what they wanted from me. Therapy did help me resolve my personal battle but resolving the issues with children seemed to be an impossible task—until I attended my first Family Constellation session. The session shed light on the patterns in the family I was married into, which spanned over two generations. It also helped me understand my children and the family dynamics. My older child, who had chosen to stay with his father in another city, returned home. After struggling with depression for almost a year, he finally felt motivated and started taking positive steps to structure his life.

What is Family Constellation?

Family Constellation is a therapeutic method that originated from the methodology of systemic therapy. It looks at life as a whole rather than focussing on incidents in

A therapist's perspective

■ By Suzi Tucker

WHEN I FIRST ARRIVE to facilitate a Family Constellation workshop, I watch with interest as people enter the room. Are they shy? Assertive? Friendly? Unsure? I am always struck by one common thread—how different we are from one another. It is the variety that has my attention, and for a brief moment it worries me. Will we understand each other? Will we come together in a good way? Will we all feel comfortable?

Then I look again, and I see how each person is nested in the context from which he or she comes. I see the mothers and the fathers, the countries, the fabric of cultures and beliefs and experience. And, as importantly, I feel my own family behind me, I feel the support and interest of everyone who has brought me to this very moment, the one in which I get to meet these people, to do this meaningful work.

Most systems—family, organisations, communities, nations, religions—are deeply settled into years and years of patterning. We are born into these systems and answerable to their edicts. It follows that we later have great difficulty discovering our own internal sense of freedom, let alone feeling assured enough to embrace it. We stay loyal to the dynamics that immediately surround us. It's a loyalty beneath the surface, subconscious and insidious. Our family loyalty may compel us in the opposite direction from what we want: Can we be happy when our father was not? Live fully when a sickly brother could not? Have love when our mother lost hers? Be successful when our country of origin is impoverished? Have children when others were given away? When such events occur when we are very young, or take place before our birth and are carried in the psyches of our parents, it is our ingrained sense that we must account for them.

isolation, thereby giving an overview to family situations. This approach helps to gain insights into the deeper reasons for the issues that are addressed during the sessions such as why certain people are denied a place, or not spoken of; and why behavioural patterns persist, often unconsciously, from one generation to the next. Bert Hellinger, the German psychotherapist who created both the Family Constellation and the Systemic Constellation methods of healing, calls this larger field the “Family Soul”. It serves as the basis for exploring and understanding our relationships as well as eventually designing solutions for unresolved issues.

The levels of healing in Family Constellation

In Hellinger's words, Family Constellation is the external movement of a cosmic event, and is neither a craft nor a method. We can assume that everything that happens and has shown itself in a Constellation is always for the good of the seeker, even if the seeker has initially started with seeking resolution for a seemingly different issue. Just as there are no two identical people, there are no two identical Constellations; be it related to enterprises, relations, professional or private life, a disease, career choice or any other issue.

According to a leading practitioner of the methodology in Mumbai, Family Constellation has to be experienced to be understood, as it is a multidimensional therapy that works across generations and people. It pinpoints the core issue among the mesh of things happening in a person's life. Every Constellation works for all three—the client, the other participants in the group and the facilitator; though the focus of the therapy is the client who brings up the issue. She adds that the sessions are not interpreted in depth, as it is best to leave it to the client to experience how the results of the therapy unfold in real life. She further discusses a case where one of her clients ate compulsively to avoid getting into a relationship, because she had taken on the role of the ‘man’ in the house after her father's death. The Constellation also revealed that the client used food to fill the void created by the lack of her mother's love, which in turn was also the case with the mother herself. The Constellation re-established the order in the family and the client opened herself to love, thereby improving the relationship between the client and her mother drastically.

The biggest advantage of choosing Family Constellation as a modality for healing is that you don't need the other person or people related

On one level, our 'instinct' guides us to stay with the past, to not abandon those left behind. This is the message received. It's not handed down in a deliberate way but it is felt as a compass hidden in a secret pocket. Deep into adulthood, this compass may provide instinctual information that we adhere to out of awareness. How can we tell? From the evidence. When something makes us happy, for example, we quickly sabotage the situation such we cannot sustain it. Or, we find that we become involved with different individuals, but the same old dynamics always come up. Or, we have great ideas, all of which lose traction right at the threshold of success. Our own fruition seems too much to bear.

My curiosity with each person who comes to work is this: to what is his or her compass attuned? In what larger context does their way of navigating make sense? We know it doesn't work well for moving forward, so where does it work? How does the



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person's issue connect to the larger backdrop of the root system? And what direction is the subliminal compass still providing?

I use a Constellation to reveal a living map of the family's history. In a workshop setting, we invite participants to represent family members or forces in the family in order to provide a 'picture' of what the client feels and what he or she is secretly connected to. Unlike a drama, the representatives are encouraged to explore the spacial relationships, to experience the tensions or freedoms of various posi-

tions, rather than to interpret or analyse information. In individual work I will ask the client to imagine these components and to report what he or she sees. In either case, the image quickly shifts from something known to something new. Once this refreshed image takes a shape, and really engages the client, he or she will be able to explore the once-hidden dynamics safely and begin to envision new ways to express loyalty and love.

to your issue to be present during the session. Most people resolve their issue in just a few sessions. Sometimes, even one session is enough and hence it's quick and very cost-effective. The resolution creates a ripple effect and thus brings about considerable shifts even in the other people related to one's issue, given the fact that they do not actively participate in the process.

This therapy can be used in combination with counselling, though it is also extremely effective even if used as the only method. Family Constellation can help find solutions in conflicts or fateful events in relationships and a family, in cases where parents who separate want to make the right decisions for their children, when historical events and calamities have had an impact on a family, when someone is in a difficult relationship and wants to work at it or end it, and when someone is faced with difficulties in their work environment. In short, anyone who wishes to resolve his internal or external conflicts can greatly benefit from this therapeutic modality.

How and where does one attend a session?

A family constellation usually takes place in a one- or two-day workshop, with a group of people all undergoing the same process, or also

as a private session. In a group workshop, the client chooses other participants to represent the people involved in his issue. Participants take turns to represent people involved in each other's issues. The group is contracted to confidentiality and respect for all members. Deeper issues may require more constellation, be it in group workshops or private sessions. Though a family constellation seems to be similar to a Psychodrama, it is completely different as it does not look at particular events in the client's life to replay them; it simply looks at the energy in each of all the participating representatives with no sense of drama and very little information of the issue or the lives of the people concerned. In a session, the person with the issue seldom participates, so that he can observe the process, but more so because his involvement could influence the true flow of the Constellation.

So if there is a family constellation session happening in your city, try it as a participating representative and experience its effect on your life. I assure you that you will look forward to bringing up your own issues when attending the next one.

■ Anupama Joshi is a freelance writer based in Mumbai.



Divisive devices

Confessions of a cell phone addict

If asked to give up your smartphone for one day, could you do it, asks **Megan Zakrzewski**

HAD YOU ASKED ME three years ago, what my biggest fear was, I would have said it was flying. No, it wasn't the thought of being more 30,000 feet above sea level, it was something else. It was the moment after the plane had been boarded, the cabin door bolted shut, and the pilot would say, "Attention all passengers. For your safety and the safety of those around you, we request you to power down all cell phones and electronic devices for the duration of this flight."

Can't live without my phone

During the time my phone was off, I would feel what is sometimes referred to as the 'phantom vibrate', a false sensation that my cell phone had vibrated when it had obviously not. I longed desperately to communicate with the outside world, and after receiving the 'go-ahead' from the pilot, I would desperately power up my phone. It felt like ages, as I would anxiously wait to receive all impending text messages, emails and notifications. My pupils would dilate from excitement as the device came to life. I would immediately FaceTime with friends and family, informing them of my safe arrival in Los Angeles, update my Facebook status with a check-in at LAX and answer any work emails with the same urgency.

It's a hopeful scenario I often imagine, especially now, when I am looking to break free from our technology-driven society. Walking down a crowded city street, my eardrums are filled with the incessant sound of cell phones ringing, buzzing, chiming, whistling and whatever else we programme them to do.

As mobile devices continue to evolve, so does the need to elicit constant communication. But is the ability to effortlessly and instantly communicate with others causing more harm than good?



Megan Zakrzewski
is a communications specialist in education. She writes for publications that focus on alumni connections, athletic communications, parent relations and more.

Communication without expression

Scientists argue that excessive use of communications technology among the teens is leading to a lack of personal expression, which in turn will lead these 'digital natives'—a generation raised around computers—to struggle with reading body language and facial expressions as adults.

Who's to say the grown-ups aren't as much the culprit as the youngsters in this case? Most adults not only rely on tablets and mobile devices to occupy their children, they also set negative examples when it comes to inappropriate cell phone usage.

Texting while driving and while crossing the street is a growing trend that is quickly becoming one of the leading causes of death. And the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration has reported that texting can increase the likelihood of a crash by up to 23 times.

I've had my fair share of scares, and though I know the danger it presents, I still feel the urge to text my friends and even surf the Web while in motion. Over time, I've learned to keep my cell phone in the back seat and out of reach while in the car, as a means of stopping all impulses to check a text message, make a phone call or take a picture of something worth sharing. The truth is, cell phone use is a bad habit that is not only taking lives. It's taking away from our lives.

No more Candy Crush Saga

One of the greatest New Year's resolutions I ever made was in 2014. It involved deleting the Candy Crush Saga app from my phone. Addicted to playing the game, I would separate myself from social situations by refusing to participate in the conversations going on around me. I was unaware of how socially awkward I had become until one afternoon while visiting family. After being asked several times to put my cell phone down and mingle, I knew I had a problem. That evening, I uninstalled the app and have yet to reactivate it.

By the end of the following week, I began to see just how much better life without Candy Crush could be, and before long, I didn't even miss it. With this in mind, I refrain from downloading similar applications to my



Break the addiction to your smartphone;
it is taking away from your lives

device today and follow several easy steps to overcoming addiction; the obvious being: leaving the phone at home.

I know you're probably thinking, "What happens if there's an emergency?" A great question and a problem I actually encountered once when I was at dinner on vacation in Washington, D.C. Not knowing that I had purposely left my phone charging in the hotel, my mother tried calling several times to tell me that my grandfather had passed. Though unfortunate to hear such news, I was lucky enough to be out with someone who had his phone on him. From then on out, I vowed to always make sure that at least one member of my party would have a phone on him or her at all times in case of an emergency.

Break off the habit

If alone and still trying to ditch the distractions, I suggest putting your phone on silent, turning off your data, or keeping it out of sight and away from your side such as in a desk drawer while at work or on the charger once home. All of these alternatives get the job done just fine when I'm looking to rid myself of senseless technology for a few minutes, a few hours or even for the entire day.

An avid concert-goer in my youth, I would

spend the majority of each performance capturing footage on my cell phone. Later on, I'd waste hours adding the blurry photos and incoherent videos to my Facebook wall. As *if anyone really cared*. Now that I am older, I leave the phone at home, live for the moment and enjoy the show. Whatever it takes to become less socially awkward. I consider myself lucky because most people deny or fail to realise they've fallen victim to this addiction.

Although work can sometimes make it impossible not to answer text messages or emails while dining out, I've witnessed entire tables of friends and families playing quietly on their phones instead of engaging in real-life conversations. We don't even think how this anti-social behaviour affects the lives of people around us.

Cell phone addiction and the destruction it can cause plague many lives today. It is our duty, both as friends and as citizens, to put a stop to it. If asked to abandon your smartphone entirely, even for a day, could you? If the answer is still a "no," hopefully you'll one day come to your senses and reconsider. Perhaps, like me, you'll find it to be one of the best decisions you've ever made.



Lettuce time

Made up of 95 per cent of water, lettuce is a healthy refreshing vegetable to enjoy during the hot summers

■ By Anjali Pathak

LETTUCE WAS FIRST CULTIVATED by the Egyptians who realised the value of its seeds and learned how to nurture this weed. They then passed this knowledge on to the Greeks and Romans.

Do you ever wonder why salad is eaten before the main course? In ancient Rome, people believed that eating lettuce would cause them to go to sleep, so they would eat their salad at the end of the meal. However, the tyrannical Roman Emperor Domitian thought that it would be fun to torture his guests during royal feasts. So he decided to start his banquets by serving lettuce at the beginning so that his guests would feel drowsy and be forced to stay awake throughout the event!

ASIAN SALAD WITH MISO SESAME DRESSING

Serves 4

What you need:

½ iceberg lettuce, shredded
½ red cabbage, shredded
1 carrot, julienne
1 celery stick, finely sliced
2 tbsp white miso paste
Good squeeze of honey
2 tbsp light olive oil
1 tbsp sesame oil
Splash of rice vinegar
Salt, to taste

1. Make the salad by mixing together the lettuce, cabbage, carrot and celery.
2. Make the dressing by whisking together the miso, honey, olive oil, sesame oil, rice vinegar and 1 tbsp of water. Taste and adjust the seasoning with salt and add more honey if it tastes too bitter or add more rice vinegar if it tastes too sweet.
3. Pour the dressing over the salad and serve.



GEM LETTUCE AND HERB SALAD WITH LEMON ZA'ATAR DRESSING

Serves 4

What you need:

4 gem lettuce, leaves separated
A large handful of salad leaves
20g flat leaf parsley, roughly chopped
15g mint leaves, roughly chopped
1 large cucumber, roughly chopped
12 cherry tomatoes, halved
4 small radish, finely sliced
3 tbsps olive oil
Zest and juice of 1 lemon
2 tbsps za'atar

1. Make the salad by finely chopping half the gem lettuce leaves and mixing them with the other salad leaves, parsley, mint, cucumber, cherry tomatoes and radish.
2. Make the lemon za'atar dressing by mixing together the olive oil, lemon juice and za'atar.
3. Dress the salad with the dressing by pouring it over and mixing well.
4. Serve the salad sprinkled with the lemon zest and garnish with whole gem lettuce leaves.



ROASTED CORN AND FETA LETTUCE WRAPS

Serves 4

What you need:

2 tbsp oil [I prefer light olive oil]
Corn kernels from 1 cob of corn
2 spring onions, roughly chopped
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 – 2 red chillies, finely sliced
Handful of coriander
4 cherry tomatoes, roughly chopped
Juice of 1 lime
Salt and pepper, to taste
1 iceberg lettuce, leaves separated
25g feta cheese

1. Gently heat the oil in a large frying pan and add the corn. Stir well and allow to turn golden brown.
2. Add the spring onions, garlic and chillies and stir well.
3. Roughly chop the stalks of fresh coriander and add to the corn with the cherry tomatoes.
4. Stir well and squeeze in the lime juice.
5. Season with salt and pepper and allow to cook for 2 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasoning.
6. Stir the coriander leaves thoroughly and pile the lettuce leaves. Sprinkle with feta cheese and serve.



ROCKET & WALNUT PESTO

Serves 4

What you need:

25g walnuts

35g rocket leaves

1 – 2 tbsp light olive oil

1 small garlic clove

Juice of ½ lemon

25g Parmesan cheese, freshly grated

2 – 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

Salt and black pepper, to taste

1. Gently toast the walnuts in a frying pan on medium heat for a few minutes. Set aside to cool while you make the pesto.
2. Using a pestle and mortar or food

processor, crush the rocket leaves with the light olive oil until crushed into a rough paste.

3. Add the garlic and toasted walnuts and grind well.
4. Squeeze in the lemon juice, stir well and add the Parmesan cheese.
5. Start adding the extra virgin olive oil, stirring as you go, until you have your desired consistency. Taste and adjust the seasoning with salt, pepper and lemon juice. I like to make it loose to stir through pasta, or keep it coarse to spread on warm crusty bread. It will stay in an airtight container in the fridge for around 5 days.



Anjali Pathak

is a chef and food writer. She has been nominated for various awards for her work with Indian food. She is co-author of an award-winning cookbook and blogs at <http://anjaliathak.com>





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Success stories

"I felt like the instructor took a glass cleaner and polished my eye, I can see clearly now."

SS, Jordan

I am already seeing more clearly. I was slightly farsighted before the course and that has gone...

AP, London

The contacts that I had been wearing were causing my eyes to have to constantly refocus... at first I thought my eyesight had worsened. To my surprise the doctor indicated that my eyesight has improved, he was surprised as he said that such a dramatic improvement is not common. I know the reason...

DB, USA

Earlier I needed glasses to feel secure but now my eyes refuse them. Another important effect of my healing is the relationship with my father. For the first time in my life I have hugged him without any problem! I spoke to him without any limits, talking about everything. Now I feel in peace with everybody.

ML, Italy

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Live your best life!

Balance your diet

The yin-yang concept tells us why instinctual living is the cornerstone to superior nutrition

■ By Kavita Mukhi



THE TERMS YIN AND YANG refer to the oriental philosophical system in which everything in the Universe is considered to be a dynamic relationship between yin and yang attributes, which complement each other as part of the whole. George Ohsawa, the father of Macrobiotics [an age-old Japanese form of healing] called it the unifying principle because it explains the unity and diversity of all things. All of life has this dual nature, a principle of balance, harmony and change.

Yang attributes are contractive or centripetal, hot, dense, heavy, flat and low. Yin attributes are expansive or centrifugal, cold, dilated, light, vertical and thin. Foods and people can be categorised according to the balance of these attributes. Men are said to be yang and women are said to be yin, although each has attributes of both—that is to say everything in nature is yin-yang but the proportions differ.

Know the yin from the yang

The following foods are listed in relative order from yin to yang: chemical additives, [the most yin], processed foods, fruits, night shade vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans, seaweeds, greens and other vegetables.

Relative order from yang to yin: Starts with salt, eggs, meats, cheese, fish, most grains and brown rice and whole grains.

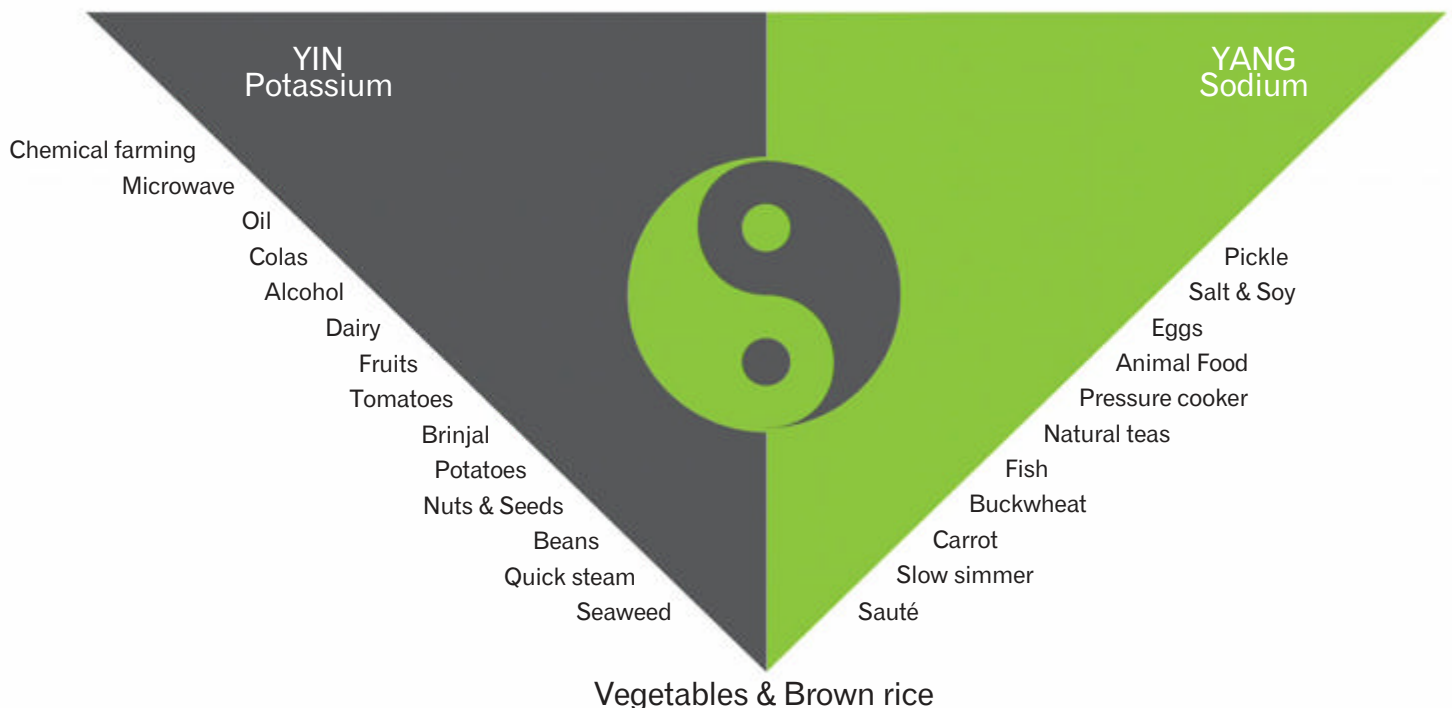
The yin-yang of foods is judged by characteristics such as their colour, growth pattern, climatic condition, height, density, hardness and sodium-potassium ratio. The most yang colour is red, corresponding to the base chakra i.e. the one closest to the ground. The

most yin colour is violet, corresponding to the crown chakra, which is the greatest distance from the ground and the most yin state.

It is important to remember that the more yang-tending or red-orange-yellow fruits are still basically yin in the total spectrum of yang and yin foods. White is a sign of a yin vegetable and black is a sign of a yang vegetable. Vegetables and fruits that are heavier, harder, shorter, and grow slower and horizontally are considered yang. Yin fruits and vegetables are lighter, softer, taller, thinner, grow faster and vertically. Foods that grow bigger and more abundantly in warmer climates are more yin. Bear in mind that the way we cut and cook our food can change its yin-yang quality.

How different is this from Ayurveda?

Ohsawa spent some time in India studying Ayurveda and therefore the many similar concepts between Macrobiotics and Ayurveda. Both systems stress on a balanced diet, based on whole grains including brown rice and millets with a variety of vegetables. In the Japanese system, pulses are replaced by



beans and soya. In India, we have a variety of local green leafy vegetables, whilst in Japan seaweed is predominant. Both systems stress the use of natural salt—either rock or sea salt—in place of refined salt. Both systems use cold pressed oil, although the use in India is more liberal and is in addition to the use of ghee. Nuts and seeds are used in both systems; India has a greater variety of seeds. Both systems use a limited amount of natural sugars and not white sugar.

Fruit is essential in the Indian diet because of our climate. This is of course meant to be fruit which is naturally ripened, un-juiced, grown locally or at least within the country, seasonal and eaten on an empty stomach. If not, the magical properties of fruits that are normally alkaline for the body may become just the opposite by contributing to an acidic situation in the blood.

In both healing diets, tomato, brinjal, capsicum and potato are considered to be not the best choice of vegetables, especially when one is recuperating from an illness. These vegetables are more yin than other vegetables.

Can there be too much yin or too much yang?

It is best to stay away from extreme yin and extreme yang foods, except when we use salt to bring balance to our meal just as we use pickles to do the same. Yet, at the same time we need to understand that even if you did consume extreme yin foods, left to its instincts your body would immediately crave the extreme yang food in order to bring the balance that it needs for survival. Thank God it does this, for without it we would all be one big mess, as is the case when we do not follow the signals of our body.

For example, when we reach for the extreme yin alcohol, the body, in its wisdom will crave for its opposite—fried salty snacks or meats or that cigarette. White sugar and white rice will make the body crave similar extreme yang foods.

When you eat too much extreme food, the body survives but in the long term it cannot deal with this stress, since essential known and unknown vitamins and minerals are

missing in such foods. Therefore there is an increase in the incidence of depression. The trick, therefore, is to allow your body to do the choosing, but in the range of yin-yang foods that are better balanced to serve our health rather than take away from it.

Ohsawa says that our will is affected by what we consume. A strong will is built by consuming mineral-rich [balanced yang] foods whilst avoiding extreme yin items that deplete our bodies and brains of minerals. Sugary foods, cookies and snacks made with white flour, white rice and carbonated beverages all lack minerals so our blood leaches them from the body, brain tissues, bones and teeth. The continued use of extreme yin foods makes the brain and its functions dilated and makes mental disorders a reality. Thus a yang body is the supportive foundation for a mind that can be yin [open to inspiration], yet probing and creative at the same time.

Thus, a diet predominantly of organic brown rice, millets, lentils, vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds will serve us well. These are balanced non-extreme yin and yang foods. Meats, eggs, dairy should form a smaller part of our intake if we enjoy them, but even so, ensure that they are from organic sources. The extreme yin foods, as in refined, chemically processed foods are best avoided. Today we have so many organic options that we have no excuse reaching for foods that lead us away from living to our full potential.

Eating with consciousness allows us to build our immunity. Yes, we can make ourselves germ/virus proof if we just start listening to what our unadulterated taste buds tell us.

I hope that this article has given you an introduction to yin-yang foods without getting you obsessed about it. Don't let it become one more confusing concept. Instead, make it one more reason to trust yourself when you choose local, seasonal, natural, whole, unrefined and organic foods.

Kavita Mukhi is an eco-nutritionist and organic evangelist for over three decades. She initiated The Farmers' Market in Mumbai in 2010. Now also a Cranio Sacral Therapist, she assists people in achieving dynamic wellness given the demands of life. www.farmersmarket.co.in.



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“Our chief want is someone
who will inspire us to be what
we know we could be.”

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE we look to leaders to show us the way ahead. So developing the personality traits that make a good leader is of great importance, particularly to those who aspire to lead in the future. Within the context of an organisation, young employees often ask me what they should do to develop leadership skills in themselves. I always have the same response. “Be yourself. That is the greatest trait of a leader.”

But people have different ideas about leadership. Some define it as a gift. They think leaders are born with a special type of charisma that helps them climb up an organisation ladder quickly. Others are of the opinion that to lead is to control, and that being the boss is to command and compel others to bend to one’s will. I disagree. But leadership isn’t backseat driving—it is leading from the front.

Gone are the days when companies ran as

dictatorships. Depending on your charisma is not enough either. The role of a leader today is to be a mentor who inspires the next generation of leaders. An able leader energises people through effective communication, not control.

I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to lead businesses in some of the most exciting and dynamic parts of the world—India, Africa and the Middle East. As a leader, I shoulder the responsibility of creating effective leaders to drive our business forward in many countries. I need to inspire many young leaders to be themselves, to do the right thing and to excel in what they are good at.

I have learnt that leadership begins with *who you are* and then it is about *what you do*. I share with you the *key principles* that have helped me to be a better leader.

Decisions

In my view, when in doubt, do the right thing, and do it with confidence. One of the biggest responsibilities a leader shoulders is to make decisions and the issues are rarely simple. What I have learned is that doing the

Be your own kind of leader

An effective leader never tries to copy anyone else’s
style of leadership, says Takashi Hata



right thing for your customers, partners and your team is always the most robust choice.

But how do we decide what is the right thing? I believe values can help us here. Leadership has to be built on a foundation of values. While vision gives direction, values set the boundaries. Values help us in making decisions at times of crisis.

For example, in any business one of the chief responsibilities of the leader is to make a profit. This can be done in the right way, such as by making the operations more efficient, building relations with suppliers and customers and creating a great product that people want; or the wrong way by taking a shortcut, such as compromising on quality to cut costs. For me, compromise is out of question, even if it is an easier option. The reason is clear—it is not the right thing to do. It is a boundary that my values have set for me—that playing to win is not the same as playing dirty.

Besides, I believe that in the long run, doing the right thing would bring success.

Determination

Leaders must constantly make and meet aggressive commitments. So determination is needed to develop high expectations and then meet them. A leader who can demand more from himself or herself can also expect more from others. That is why my second principle has been *to stay determined*; it is critical.

Let me share how we do this at Nissan. As I write this, we are expanding our dealer network. A step-by-step approach is necessary to building relations with partners and training staff. My team members are travelling around India every day. The work takes time but I am always encouraging the team, urging them to stay determined and be optimistic about our bright future.

No matter what the compulsion, there is one thing which should never change and that is your strong determination to stay the course and win.

Diversity

Today, many of us work in multicultural, multinational and diverse work environments. We work with teams of people who come from different places, speak different languages and report into different hierarchies with varied targets and incentives. To lead them we should aim *to embrace diversity*.

Having worked in different industries

and in different countries has helped me appreciate the value of diversity and has also taught me to not place any limits on myself. As leaders, we need to have a lot more empathy and sensitivity—not just for people who are similar to us in race and mindsets, but also for those from other countries and cultures. We need to be able to respond and interact with people from many different backgrounds at the same time. We need to learn to be open-minded and expand our cultural boundaries. To accomplish this, we must strive to create borderless organisations and influence through knowledge. Also, we need to be active instead of reactive, and shape ideas instead of responding to them.

Your leadership style

“Leadership is a style,” said Jack Welch, the famous former Chairman and CEO of GE. This thought has influenced and guided me in my journey as a leader. I believe that successful leaders endeavour to develop a style that is true to their personality. They all pursue and deliver their goals, but they have their own unique way of providing direction, implementing plans and inspiring people.

The lesson here is to not try to copy anyone else—rather to work on our own unique style. If you succeed in this, your leadership will shine through.

My personal experience

Looking back, my career has been very varied. I started out in the plastic industry, specifically in petrochemicals. Later, I was invited to run a car transmissions manufacturer. Along the way I worked in Germany, China, and Indonesia, as well as Japan. Now I am part of Nissan’s top management team and the head of the Africa, Middle East and India with a mission to expand the company’s business across the region. I have enjoyed every phase of my career.

What my experience has taught me is that I should not limit myself. Experiences in different fields and with different people provide great value. They equip me with knowledge, a broad perspective and a useful network. But I have to stay humble, flexible and thoughtful while staying determined and loyal to my values.



Takashi Hata

is Senior Vice-President of Nissan Motor Co. Ltd. In his career spanning more than 30 years, he has held various leadership positions in major Japanese corporations.



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Do you dream of choking that colleague who gets on your nerves? **Margaret Andrews** offers you some unusual advice on dealing with the annoying habits of your coworkers

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

WHAT A WONDERFUL DAY that would be if you could make it through one entire workday without the temptation to strangle the guy [or girl] in the next cubicle, right? If it's not Prasoon who clears his throat every 14 seconds, it's Bipasha in the pantry area reheating her smelly fish for lunch and stinking up the whole office. Again.

How can you go on working with these people who drive you batty on a daily basis? Luckily for you, I have all the answers to help you regain your sanity and leave the anxiety for the significantly smaller irritants in life. Like commuter traffic.



The Loud Talker

This is the guy who can't keep his voice down whether he yaks on the phone with his proctologist or blows your hair back from point-blank range as he blusters on about his weekend at the lake on his friend's gold-plated yacht. The solution to this one is easy. Bring a gong to office. Every time that hot airbag opens his mouth, bang that gong until he goes away.

Okay seriously, headphones should do the trick. For you, not him. [If you gave that guy headphones, his decibel level would hit the red zone.]

The Cougher

This also goes for the hummer, the whistler, the throat clearer, the sniffer, the mumblor, the heavy sigher, the tongue clicker and the coffee slurper. The first time the offender offends, scream, "OMG! You scared me!" The second time it happens, yell out and slap a hammer down hard on your desk. Say, "Holy Moly, that startled me!" Keep this up until the offender stops or asks to be moved elsewhere.

Or, you could try headphones against it's purely up to you.

The Fish Monger

Nothing stinks up the kitchen and the office like a reheated seafood buffet. Should any clueless coworker [like the aforementioned Bipasha] have the audacity to bring in such a noxious lunch, say something like, "Holy Mackerel! Who farted? Did someone fart?" Trust me, you'll be the hero of the office for simply expressing what everyone else is thinking but doesn't have the nerve to say.

The Non-replacer

This is the lazy woman, probably the freckled sandal-wearer in Human Resources, who leaves one square of toilet paper on the roll instead of replacing it. She is the same person who leaves two sips of coffee in the pot and doesn't make more. She undoubtedly does this at home. Therefore, the answer to this problem is to call her husband and inquire as to what he does to put a stop to such selfish behaviour.



You can't control the behaviour of others, but you can choose how you respond to it



Margaret Andrews is a freelance writer and has a humour blog *nannygoatsinpanties.com*. Her latest book is *Adventures in Blogville: A Creative Writing Guide for Teens*.

The Chronic Farter or Burper

So, Bob is a nice guy and all, but he's really let himself go in his later years and he really lets "it" go in the office. All day long. It's a daily thunderstorm that stinks so bad it keeps the bugs away, which might be a good thing, but if you can't see your own computer screen through the tears and the fog, how are you expected to get any work done? Well, let me just save you a lot of time right now.

Recent studies show that men fart way more than women in the office. It would behoove you to surround yourself with women when you are first assigned your desk. If you didn't think of this and you are stuck sitting next to Bob and his storm-clouded cubicle, try screaming, "Holy Gasp! Did someone cook fish? Is someone cooking fish? Bipasha, is that you?"

The truth is, your proximity to Bob is your own fault, and unless you're willing to take him to the doctor for a prescription or get the guy to lay off *wada pav* and *chole bhature* for a while, get a desk fan.

The Clipper

This is the guy [why am I picking on guys so much? Because they are gross when it comes to hygiene]... anyway, this is the guy who pulls off his shoes and socks, and clips his toenails right there at his desk. [See? I told you they were gross.] You're having a pleasant day at work so far, only to be interrupted by the high-pitched clipping of human talons, which are most likely flying across the aisle onto your desk and landing like rice grains on your resignation letter to the boss.

Don't let this nasty man drive you out of a job. Fight back. Bring in one of those air guns they have at sporting events where they shoot T-shirts into the crowd. Start with shooting a handful of worms in his direction and go from there. Build up in size and grossness until you find something that gets his attention. It might take all day, but it will be worth it.

The Flosser

What is it with people ejecting or flicking small bits from their body onto your desk or

in your hair? I'm even willing to assign this example to a woman because, gender equality. Now, if Tanya flosses at her desk, I have two words for you: mosquito netting.

However, if Tanya flosses over your shoulder—which has happened to someone I know, and the offender was a *guy*—actually, now that I think of it, the same two words apply.

The Real Answer

In all due seriousness, let's consider the fact that many governments don't have the resources to feed and shelter these mentally ill people; they are left in the cruel harsh world to fend for themselves and they are trying, God bless 'em, at least they have jobs.

For your own sanity and wellbeing, you must find a way to relieve your stress over the toenail clipper and the coffee sipper and the let-it-ripper. Especially if it's the same person. Campaign with your boss to move desks. Campaign to work from home. Get your boss to sympathise by campaigning to switch desks with him or her personally. This will put your boss in your shoes for a second, maybe enough so that he will try to help you, after a quick gag reflex because he has his own issues with tooth crevice jam.

So take a deep breath and remember that your annoying coworkers are not as evolved or self-aware as you are. Have some compassion for our less fortunate brethren [and sistren] who can't help themselves.

Treat your work relationships like a marriage, where you are stuck with these nose-picking, space-invading people for the unforeseeable future. Find ways to cope, whether it's wearing headphones or purging on Facebook.

You can't control the behaviour of others, but you can choose how you respond to it. Writing it down can heal your pain or at least get it off your chest and make you feel better. Why does all this stuff get on your last nerve, anyway? It's not like you're so flawless either, you know. Maybe *you're* the one with the problem, complaining all the time, did you ever think of that?



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Homemade work

Chandana Banerjee reveals the dynamics of working from home so that you are aware of what you're getting into before you take the plunge

I'VE BEEN WORKING AS A WRITER and a health coach for nine years now, setting up my office wherever I find a spot in my abode. The experience of working from home has been dynamic and varied, to say the least.

While there's plenty to like about this lifestyle, there are some bits that can be challenging. Let's look at the good and the bad of working from home.

THE HASSLES

Interferences

Just as you fire up the laptop and jot down your to-dos, there's someone at the door for the nth time, the domestic help has yet another question for you, your neighbour drops in for some tea and chitchat, the dog needs to

be walked, a friend calls up with a request... Every time you try to get a chunk of work done, there are a dozen things vying for your attention.

You may go hoarse telling the world that you work from home and requesting them to kindly leave you alone for a while, but to everyone, even your most well-meaning friends, you're just at home... And work? It can be done anytime.

Temptations

When your home is also your workplace, there are many temptations that can, and do, nibble into your work time. Without a firewall to block your online cruising, there's no limit to the time you can fritter away checking your social media updates. Plus, you don't have a boss hovering around to check how you spend your work day—so it's easy to fall for the temptation to chat with your friend on Facebook, shop at the nearest mall, get a manicure at the salon, sort out the laundry, clean the kitchen, read a book... anything that seems more appealing than work.



Snags

Just when you have a tight deadline to meet or an online conference call, the internet goes dead on you or your computer crashes. Or worse, there's a power cut. A home-office professional's life is punctuated [and punctured] with such challenges, especially when there's a deadline/important work commitment nipping at your heels.

Responsibilities

If you have a small child at home, your parental responsibilities stay with you throughout your work hours too. There's no way you can continue working when there's a howling toddler banging at your door, begging to be cuddled. Not to forget, the constant reminders and instructions you have to give the babysitter.

Self-discipline

There's a general impression among people that those who work-at-home professionals have it easy. On the contrary it requires a lot more hard work and self-discipline to make it work from home. For self-employed professionals, new projects don't always land on the plate—they have to work harder, and keep looking for opportunities.

THE JOYS

If, by now, you've begun to think that working-from-home is overrated and that you're ready to dump this option, hold on. While it isn't for the fainthearted, there's a bucket load of goodness in working from home.

Freedom

This is most definitely the biggest plus of working from home. The freedom that you enjoy is worth all the challenges that this option brings with it. For instance, you can do up your work desk as you like, play your favourite music if you want and do pretty much what you want, while you work. You can decide your schedule and pace of work as per your disposition and preferences. Some people are most productive in the early mornings, and some others prefer working at night. Some like to work quick, others like it slow and steady. If you work from home, you can choose whatever pace or schedule suits

you. Working mothers can adjust their work hours as per their child's school timings.

Comfort

Do you like staying in your pyjamas and slippers? Why not! You have the luxury to wear whatever feels comfortable, at least most of the time. Formal attire is not a necessity, unless you do video conferencing with your clients and need to appear well-groomed. You can also sit where and how you want... even on floor if you prefer. Nothing and no one can come in the way of your comfort.

Food

Working from home affords you the privilege of fresh, hot and healthy home-made food that is always more satisfying than eating in a cafeteria; it's also more economical.

Time and energy

Commuting to and from work, especially in cities, is cumbersome, unproductive and often stressful, what with ever greater traffic jams and the rising pollution. Plus, there's the weather that often plays truant, especially when it pours. Working from home spares you the daily commute and saves you time, money and energy, besides protecting you from the accompanying stress and those noxious fumes on the road. You can put the saved time and energy to better use by working on an additional project, spending more time with your family, pursuing a hobby, and exercising.

On the move

As a military spouse, I follow my husband to far-flung corners of the country where, had it not been for my work-at-home career, I'd not have been able to work at all. If travel is a part of your lifestyle, then working from home fits right in because you can take your work with you, no matter where you move.

Armed with a realistic picture of the pros and cons of a work-from-home life, you can decide whether this lifestyle will work for you, and what you need to plan for and work around when you do set up that home office.

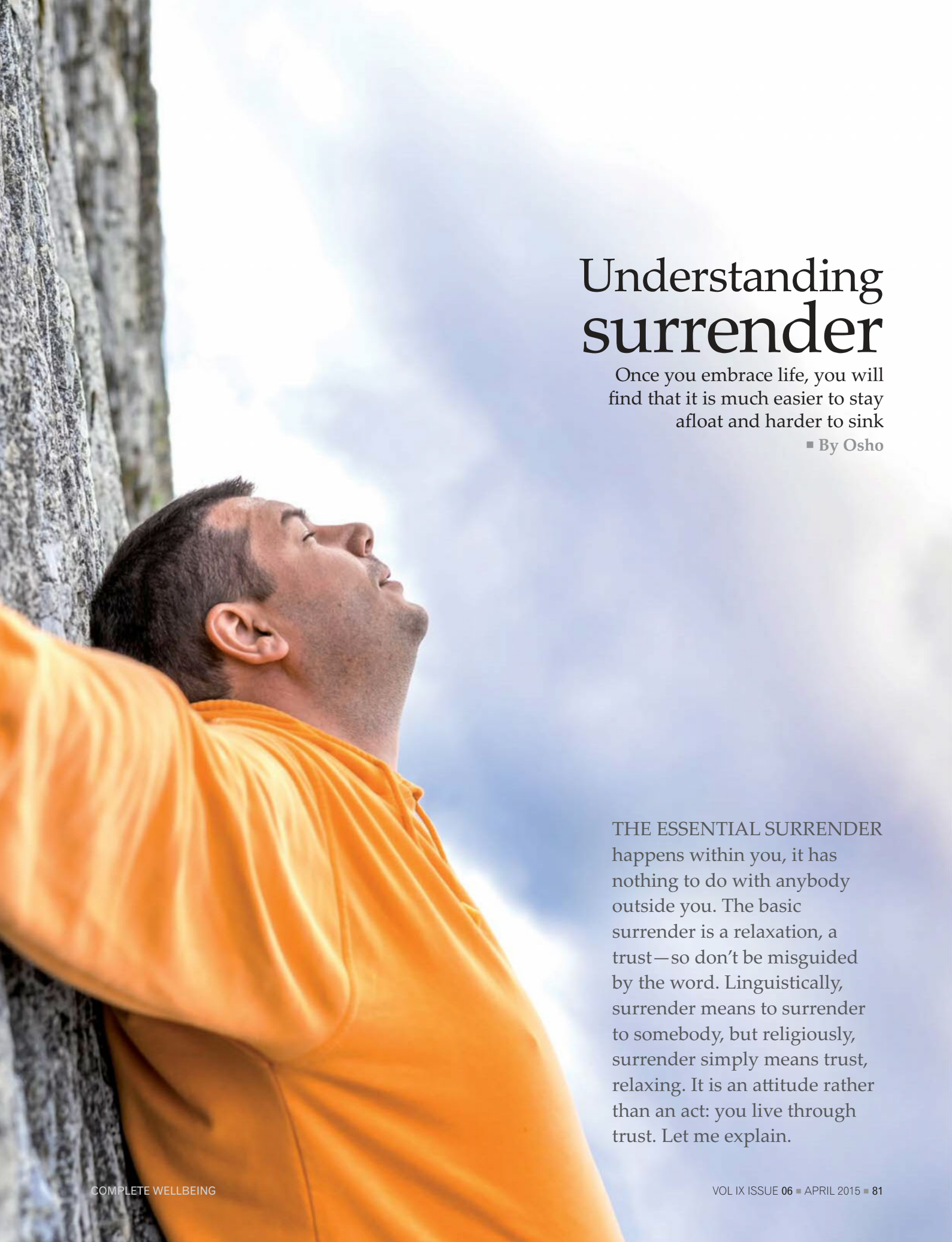


Chandana Banerjee is a journalist, illustrator, health coach and yoga teacher-in-training who loves working-from-home as she follows her Air Force officer husband around. She blogs at www.babystepstoworkingfromhome.com and at www.chandanabanerjee.com.



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Understanding surrender

Once you embrace life, you will
find that it is much easier to stay
afloat and harder to sink

■ By Osho

THE ESSENTIAL SURRENDER happens within you, it has nothing to do with anybody outside you. The basic surrender is a relaxation, a trust—so don't be misguided by the word. Linguistically, surrender means to surrender to somebody, but religiously, surrender simply means trust, relaxing. It is an attitude rather than an act: you live through trust. Let me explain.



Osho was never born and never died. He only visited this planet earth between 11 December 1931 and 19 January 1990. He was a charismatic and gifted speaker who became the leader of a worldwide new spiritual movement.

Stop fighting, start floating

You swim in water—you go to the river and swim. What do you do? You trust the water. A good swimmer trusts so much that he almost becomes one with the river. He is not fighting, he does not grab the water, he is not stiff and tense. If you are stiff and tense you will drown; if you are relaxed the river takes care. That's why whenever somebody dies, the dead body floats on the water. This is a miracle. Amazing! The alive person died and was drowned by the river, and the dead person simply floats on the surface. What has happened? The dead person knows some secret about the river which the alive person did not know. The alive person was fighting. The river was the enemy. He was afraid, he could not trust. But the dead person, not being there, how could he fight? The dead person is totally relaxed with no tension—so the body floats. The river takes care. No river can drown a dead person.

Trust means you are not fighting; surrender means you don't think of life as the enemy but as the friend. Once you trust the river, suddenly you start enjoying. Tremendous delight arises: splashing, swimming, or just floating, or diving deep. But you are not separate from the river, you merge, you become one.

Surrender means to live the same way in life as a good swimmer swims in the river.

**SURRENDER MEANS TO LIVE
THE SAME WAY IN LIFE AS A
GOOD SWIMMER SWIMS IN
THE RIVER. EITHER YOU CAN
FIGHT OR YOU CAN FLOAT**

Life is a river. Either you can fight or you can float; either you can push the river and try to go against the current or you can float with the river and go wherever the river leads you.

Even God is not needed

Surrender is not towards somebody; it is simply a way of life. A God is not needed to surrender to. There are religions which believe in God and there are religions which don't, but all religions believe in surrender. So surrender is the real God. Even the concept of God can be discarded. Buddhism does not believe in any God, Jainism does not believe in any God—but they are religions. Christianity believes in God, Islam believes in God, Sikhism believes in God—they are also religions. The Christian teaches surrender to God; God is just an excuse to surrender. It helps, because it will be difficult for you to surrender without any object. The object is just an excuse so that in the name of God you can surrender. Buddhism says simply surrender—there is no God. You relax. It is not a question of some object, it is a question of your own subjectivity. Relax, don't fight. Accept.

The belief in God is not needed. In fact, the word 'belief' is ugly. It does not show trust, it does not show faith—belief is almost the very opposite of faith. The word 'belief' comes from a root 'lief', which means to desire, to wish. Now let me explain it to you. You say, "I believe that God is compassionate." What exactly are you saying? You are saying, "I wish there was a God who is compassionate." Whenever you say, "I believe," you say, "I intensely desire." But you don't know.

Know, don't believe

If you know, there is no question of belief. Do you believe in the trees here? Do you believe in the sun which arises every morning? Do you believe in the stars? There is no question

of belief. You know that the sun is there, that the trees are there. Nobody believes in the sun—if he did, you would say he is mad. If somebody came and said, “I believe in the sun,” and tried to convert you, you would say, “You have gone mad!”

Once you know, what is the point of belief? Belief is in ignorance. If you know, you know. And it is good that if you don’t know, know that you don’t know—the belief can deceive you. The belief can create an atmosphere in your mind, where, without knowing, you start thinking that you know. Belief is not trust, and the more strongly you say that you believe totally, the more you are afraid of the doubt within you.

Trust knows no doubt. Belief is just repressing doubt; it is a desire. When you say, “I believe in God,” you say, “I cannot live without God. It will be too difficult to exist in this darkness, surrounded by death, without a concept of God.” That concept helps. One doesn’t feel alone; one doesn’t feel unprotected, insecure—hence belief.

Trust is simple. It is just like a child trusts in his mother. It is not that he believes—belief has not yet entered. You were a small child once. Did you believe in your mother or did you trust her? The doubt has not arisen, so what is the question of belief? Belief comes only when the doubt has entered; doubt comes first. Later on, to suppress the doubt, you catch hold of a belief. Trust is when doubt disappears; trust is when doubt is not there.

For instance, you breathe. You take a breath in; then you exhale, you breathe out. Are you afraid of breathing out, because who knows, it may not come back? You trust. You trust it will come. Of course there is no reason to trust, what is the reason? Why should it come back? You can at the most say that in the past it has been happening so—but that is not a guarantee. It may not happen in the future. If you become afraid of breathing

**YOU TAKE A BREATH IN; THEN
YOU BREATHE OUT. ARE YOU
AFRAID OF BREATHING OUT,
BECAUSE WHO KNOWS, IT MAY
NOT COME BACK? YOU TRUST**

out because it may not come back, then you will hold your breath in. That’s what belief is—clinging, holding. But if you hold your breath in, your face will go purple and you will feel suffocated. And if you go on doing that, you will die.

Trust and relax

All beliefs suffocate. They deaden your being. If you exhale, you trust in life. The Buddhist word ‘nirvana’ simply means exhaling, breathing out—trusting. Trust is a very, very innocent phenomenon. Belief is of the head; trust is of the heart. One simply trusts life because you are out of life, you live in life, and you will go back again to the source. There is no fear. You are born, you live, you will die; there is no fear. You will be born again, you will live again, you will die again. The same life that has given you life can always give you more life, so why be afraid? Why cling to beliefs? Beliefs are philosophical; trust has nothing to do with philosophy. Trust simply shows that you know what love is. It is not a concept of God who is sitting somewhere in heaven and manipulating and managing. Trust needs no God, the infinite life, this totality, is more than enough. Once you trust, you relax. That relaxation is surrender.



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Seeing things as they are

My first vipassana meditation retreat

■ By Gabriel Rocheleau



I FIRST HEARD about Vipassana retreats on a forum where people from around the world shared their experiences and claimed to have got incredible results from it. I looked into it just to make sure it was not some brainwashing sectarian nonsense and then signed up for a 10-day retreat.

What these retreats are

Vipassana meditation retreats are offered worldwide by a non-profit organisation. They are open to all and are strictly supported by voluntary donations. The teachings come from the Buddhist Theravada tradition, more specifically by the tradition of S N Goenka, a Burmese-Indian meditation teacher, but are presented in a universal manner, making them accessible to everyone. In these 10-day retreats, we are not allowed to communicate with the outside world in any way nor speak to the other participants. We can't even bring anything to read, watch, listen to or write with. We are woken up every morning at 4am and, apart from brief interruptions to eat and listen to instructions, we meditate all day long until sleep time, at 9:30pm. The schedule is strict, but it enables you to experience the retreat with minimal distractions. If you can do this without the need for a rigid schedule you probably don't need to come to a vipassana retreat.

My experience

Arriving there in the late afternoon, I was assigned a room, and shortly, we—a group of about 30 people—entered the meditation hall. There, we received the first instructions: “focus on the breath, at the entrance of the nostrils”. That was all for the first evening. Day 1 of the 10-day retreat actually begins the next morning.

Next morning, we were woken up by a gong at 4am for the 4.30am meditation, which would last two hours. I got into the meditation hall at about 4:20am, sat down and began meditating. I had brought my watch to the meditation hall, which was a terrible idea. After what I thought had been an hour, I looked at it: 4:38am! I couldn't wait to get further

instructions. However, as the day progressed, the same indications were given again and again, until the evening discourse: to focus on the breath. Admittedly the technique seemed boring to me then.

The evening discourse was great though and it clarified my doubts and motivated me to keep practising. I learned that this technique was designed to sharpen our concentration so that eventually we are able to practise the meditation as precisely and efficiently as possible.

For the next two days, we kept focussing on the breath, and I felt the mind getting much more malleable and aware of subtleties. At the end of the 3rd day, we were told that the next day, we would learn Vipassana—which means “seeing things as they really are”. On the 4th day, after more than 35 hours of watching the breath, we now directed our attention to our sensations, scanning our body from the top of the head to the tips of the toes. The technique consists of watching these sensations with equanimity—without craving or aversion—to develop insights concerning the ultimate nature of reality and ourselves.

All the subtle sensations I felt amazed me. So much was happening, yet I was never aware of it! At the end of the 5th day, I felt great; I felt like my awareness and equanimity were solid. But this was put to test the next day...

On day six, I woke up sick. My nose was clogged, my head pounding and my throat burning. I couldn't divert my attention, I had to watch these sensations patiently, hour after hour. Although I didn't consider leaving at all, I was annoyed by my condition. I saw it as a burden. This mental annoyance lasted until the end of the 7th day, when my mindset totally changed.

I realised that the sickness was there, whether I wanted it or not. The only constructive thing to do was to observe the sensations fully, with acceptance. I now saw my condition as an opportunity, and approached my last evening meditation with strong determination.

Ardently watching the sensations arising and passing away without reacting to them, I perceived them with unprecedented clarity. Suddenly, they melted down completely into tiny vibrations. When it was time to sleep, I had no interest in doing so, and meditated for the most part of the night. The peace of mind and joy that was arising was nothing like I had ever experienced before. Even the 'unpleasantness' of the symptoms was seen with humour and happiness.

Ironically, waking up on the 8th day, the symptoms were gone.

Day 10 – The last day of my Vipassana experience

For the last few days of the retreat, meditation was mostly effortless for me. On the 10th day, the schedule is loosened and you are allowed to talk to each other. Day 10 was my last chance at completing a meditation of staying absolutely still for a full hour. In the previous such meditations, I failed around the 30 to 40 minutes mark. It was my mind that, at some point, became too agitated. It's hard to explain, but it wasn't a physical sensation. The best comparison I can come up with is being highly anxious and stressed.

The beginning of the meditation actually went pretty well. About 45 minutes into the meditation, though, I started getting those weird anxious feelings again. I did my best to continue practising, trying to acknowledge the feelings without being 'disturbed' by them. It was like every cell of my body was actively trying to throw me off track.

Very surprisingly, after enduring those horrible feelings for a few minutes, I sort of 'forgot about them' and kept on meditating.

When the recorded chanting began, I knew there were only five minutes left and at this point, I definitely wasn't going to move.

When the meditation ended, the prohibition to talk was waived. Although I hadn't said a word in the whole retreat, I still feel like I developed a strong sense of friendship with other meditators. I learnt that human connections are much more than words!

I talked with a handful of interesting people. We enjoyed a great meal and spent the rest of our day chatting. We also had two other mandatory meditations, one in the afternoon and the other in the evening. The afternoon one went well. The evening meditation was... a different story.

After the afternoon meditation, I talked to one of the guys who had been sitting next to me in the meditation hall. We discussed about our experience and he told me he noticed that while meditating, our swallowing was way noisier than others [on my part, that was probably due to me having a cold]. For the whole retreat, he said he thought of us as the "frog brothers" [The mind can be very creative when trying to distract you from meditating].

Next, I spoke with a guy who had been, for the last 10 days, trying his best not to laugh during the meditations. Since he was sitting close to me in the meditation hall, I had already noticed him trying to hold himself from laughing out loud. He's a guy who, in daily life, loves to tell jokes, laugh and talk to people. The 'silent' part of the retreat was highly challenging to him.

Finally, as we sat for our last meditation, I started to meditate normally, but soon I heard my 'frog brother' being pretty noisy. I thought it would be funny to try to beat him in a 'frog contest' by being noisier than him. Stupid idea!

Although I expected him to laugh, he didn't flinch and remained still. Reflecting on what I had thought and sort of 'visualising' it, I found it funnier and funnier and eventually felt laughter come to my cheeks and tongue. I managed to hold it back for a while, but at

WHEN IT WAS TIME TO SLEEP,
I HAD NO INTEREST IN DOING
SO, AND MEDITATED FOR
MOST PART OF THE NIGHT

Gabriel Rocheleau is a meditation and yoga practitioner, traveller, musician and blogger. He believes to grow at all costs, thrive in perpetual change and make chaos his refuge. He blogs at <http://www.updevelopment.org/>



some point I couldn't help it and burst out laughing. Guess what happened next?

The guy who had been holding his laugh for the past week burst out laughing as well, and did so louder than me. A few seconds after, my roommate started laughing too. In order not to annoy everyone, I left the room. The two other guys joined me outside quickly afterwards. Our laughter was unstoppable!

I went for a walk in the woods alone and eventually, my laughter did diminish. In order to stop laughing, I tried to 'force myself to laugh', which ironically, made it stop. After what had been about 10 minutes, I went back into the meditation hall and resumed my meditation. 20 minutes later, my roommate came back to meditate but the other guy never came back. When we got outside, he was lying in the grass, still laughing his head off.

We spent the rest of the evening having great discussions about life purpose, meditation and relationships. We were strongly encouraged to meditate at least two hours a day, which sounded like a lot to me, and to keep a healthy lifestyle.

I went back home—after more than 120 hours of meditation—with happiness, joy and enthusiasm.

Coming back

It's been a while now since my first Vipassana retreat and I can say that it represents a turning point in my life. I'm more grounded, less judgmental, more 'in the present moment' and most importantly, I have the absolute certainty that I can deal with whatever may happen in life.

The technique is so simple that one may wonder how it can produce such incredible results. But year after year, hundreds of thousands of people attend them, and no one leaves unchanged. Suspending daily routines and habits for a while and undertaking this practice is something I recommend to everyone.

Tips and encouragements

If you go on a retreat, be sure to follow the rules and instructions to the letter. People

who twist the rules and do it 'their own way' end up either not receiving the benefits, or leaving early, rationalising that the technique doesn't work for them. Also, I would recommend setting some time off after the experience. Your return to routine life will be much less uncomfortable if you allow yourself to progressively come back to your obligations.

Such intense retreats shouldn't be taken lightly, and leaving halfway could prove to be quite stressful for the mind. Making a firm resolution to stay in the retreat until the end is very helpful in staying focussed in your practice; if you leave the door open, the mind may convince you to simply leave because it's hard. If possible, I would recommend starting to follow the retreat's sleeping schedule and to eat lighter evening meals a few days before going. That will get your body to gradually adjust, and will make your retreat less uncomfortable.

Lots of people wonder whether they should practise meditation before the retreat, and are scared of the 'meditations of strong determination'. Although it is definitely beneficial to practise meditation and to get used to sitting on a cushion, there is a level of discomfort that is inherent in such practices, and that can't be avoided. The goal is not really to minimise the physical discomfort, but to learn to deal with it. Also, in the retreats I've been to, a variety of cushions, benches and chairs were available for practitioners. The goal definitely isn't to torture yourself but to take the opportunity to look at various sensations, including pain, and develop understanding and wisdom.

Don't be scared; millions of people have been through these retreats before, and returned home with immense benefits. You're not less able than them, and you can certainly do this; it could even change your life.



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Have always dreamed of having a kitchen garden but didn't know how to create one? **Nitya Anand Nadar** tells you all you need to know to get started

Be an urban farmer

AS A CHILD GROWING UP in Mumbai, I believe I was fortunate to have the privilege of a big garden in our home. Both my parents took great interest to care for our plants and I could recognise most trees by looking at their leaves. My mum even had a bringal corner with every possible colour and shape of brinjal. It was wonderful to have such an 'earthy' life in my growing years. Post marriage I ventured into kitchen gardening in our apartment window.

I started with growing simple herbs and slowly moved towards growing fruits and vegetables. I have learned to use whatever little harvest I get from my garden to make food. The flowers, fruits, vegetables and herbs from our window garden have cheered and comforted us. Kitchen gardening in small spaces may have its own challenges but the joy and thrill of plucking a part of your meal from your own garden and knowing that it has zero chemicals makes it worthwhile. If I can do it successfully from my apartment in Mumbai, I think anyone can.

Once the gardening bug catches you, there is no turning back. Suddenly, your weekend outings may revolve around trips to the local plant nursery to buy seeds for your kitchen garden and your vacations will involve asking the customs officers to allow you to carry a Meyer lemon tree back home.



Nitya Anand Nadar is a practising homoeopathic doctor in Mumbai. She loves organic kitchen gardening and enjoys encouraging fellow home gardeners in growing plants in balconies, terraces and window sills.

What can you grow in a balcony garden?

Consider growing only those plants that you will use, take into account the space that you have, while making sure it adds aesthetic appeal to the place. Here are some examples.

Leafy vegetables: Palak, *methi*, amaranthus [green and red], Ceylon spinach, Malabar spinach, purslane, gongura, lettuce, kale, drumstick leaves, onion greens [excellent for omelettes], Colacassia [*Patra*].

Micro-greens: These are a balcony gardener's delight. You can try mustard, *saunf*, radish or *methi*.

Spices: You can grow allspice [an aromatic plant which smells like a combination of spices—and use the leaves for an aromatic blend in stews], *tej patta*, peppercorns, turmeric, ginger.

Herbs: Mint, thyme, parsley, celery, garlic chives, cuban borage [commonly known as *Ajwain patta*] green chillies, basil.

Vegetables: Try growing the bush/dwarf varieties in small spaces. Tomatoes, broad beans, double beans, french beans, cluster beans, brinjals, capsicums and all gourds grow well.

Root Vegetables: Potatoes, sweet potatoes, radishes, turnips, carrots and taro roots [*arbi*] can be grown at home.

Fruits: Strawberries, mandarins, kumquats, star fruits, passion fruits and musk melons. The yield may not be large but again even a few home-grown fruits have a pleasure of their own. If you own a large terrace, you could even grow mangoes, bananas, papayas in drums!

Edible Flowers: Red gongura flowers, pansy, butterfly pea flower [*shankapushpa*], rose, nasturtiums and hibiscus [petal colours are water soluble—do use the five petal varieties only].

The yield of each plant varies, for example a chilly plant will grow for 2–4 years and yield plenty of chillies. You could let them ripen on the plant and dry the red chillies. These can be ground to give you home-made red chilli powder from your kitchen garden.

What you will need

Balcony or kitchen gardening is about growing plants without the use of any chemicals either as pesticides or fertilisers.

For achieving the above we must focus on





1 How many capsicums can you spot?

2 Tomatoes lined up and ripening

3 Egg plant almost there

4 Sweet success at growing bitter melon

5 Zucchini and its blossoms make a pretty sight

6 Strawberry to top a cup cake

providing good growing conditions and pay attention to the nutrition of the plant. This naturally ensures that it is not prone to any plant diseases/pest attacks.

» **Sunlight** – Choose a well lit balcony, for fruiting vegetables like tomatoes 4 – 6 hours of sun is good. Leafy greens do well in 3 – 4 hours of sunlight. If getting sufficient sun light is not easy then go for shade loving plants.

» **Containers** – You can choose from pots, ceramic containers, terracotta pots, clay pots, grow bags, recycled broken buckets or even 1 – 2 litre soft drink bottles.

10 inch pots are ideal for vegetables, while a rectangular shallow pot can be used for leafy greens. For fruits like lemons and star fruits, you can use larger pots.

» **Potting mix** – This should be in the ratio of 1:1:1:1 red soil: vermi compost: coco peat: compost/cow dung manure.

When growing vegetables you need to add about 1 tsp of neem cake and 2 tbsp of wood ash to the potting mix. This will give a kick start to our plants and also combat any pest problems.

» **Nutrition** – In addition to the potting mix/soil, which is the first step to healthy plants, some nutrition should be provided once a week or every 10 days. For this, add a handful of compost/ cow dung manure/ vermi compost once a week/ 10 days. Neem cake should be added once a month, while bone meal and peanut cake dissolved in water can be added once in 15 days. Liquid fertilisers can also be added; I make my own compost tea or use leachate from my compost bin. I also use *Panchagavya*, which can be made or bought from the store and used after diluting with water.

» **Water** – I cannot stress enough on how over-watering not only attracts pests but is also more detrimental to plant growth. Some plants love a lot of water but none of them like wet feet. Watering also depends on the season, during the heat in summer your plants may need to be watered twice a day but in monsoon they might not need watering.

» **Seeds** – If you are new to kitchen gardening, start with seeds from your kitchen cabinet. Some of the easy to start with plants are palak, methi, amaranthus, chillies and tomatoes. Growing as per the season gives maximum yield. For example, sowing watermelon seeds in late February gives you juicy watermelons in the summer months.

» **Saplings** – You can buy saplings from nurseries, especially for fruit trees like lemon, which are generally the grafted

kinds, so fruiting starts faster. When buying saplings of vegetable plants from nurseries, avoid those which are loaded with vegetables... they may not do well in a new environment. When you buy saplings, make sure they are young so they grow under your care and mature to give ample vegetables.

- » **Tools** – You will need to buy a shovel, a spade, a garden fork, a watering can and cutting tools or pruning shears.

Process

1. Sow the seeds in small containers—even empty yoghurt containers will do. Large seeds like beans need to be buried an inch deep into the soil whereas tiny seeds like lettuce and amaranthus can be loosely scattered on top of the soil and an inch of potting mix/cocopeat can be added on top.
2. Once you sow, sprinkle gently with some water.
3. Keep these containers under indirect sun, preferably on a window sill. Some recommend covering the containers with a cardboard lid.
4. Within a 7 – 15 days you will see your seeds germinating.
5. Shift them out and expose them to a few hours of sunlight daily and then return them to the window sill. After a week you can leave them out for the day and night. Water gently or only spray when you see the soil a bit dry.

Transfer plants like chillies, tomatoes and brinjals within a month to a larger pot.

Creepers like cucumbers, passion fruit vines and bottle gourds will need a trellis for support. Once you transplant them to a bigger pot, get creative with ropes or bamboo to give them support on the balcony walls and grill.

Lettuce and other leafy greens can be sown directly in big pots.

Ideally you should transplant the plant in the evening so that your plant settles into its



Pics: NITYA ANAND NADAR

Harvest of the day: root vegetables like potatoes and radishes are easy to grow at home

new home in the gentle cooler temperature of night. Once transplanted, water quickly with nutrient-enriched water. Water with compost tea once in 10 days.

Pest management

If your plant is healthy, pest attacks are minimum. Planting ornamental plants in between edible plants helps curb pest attack. For example, marigold flowers will attract all the pests and your other edible plants will be spared. Planting mint/ basil/ garlic chives alongside tomatoes keeps most pests away. The flowers from your ornamental plants may also attract bees for pollination of your brinjal flowers. Should your plants get infested with pests, you can grind chillies and garlic to make a robust pest control spray. Strain the chilli garlic paste, dilute with water and spray onto plants. Another good organic pest control mix is neem oil mixed with water to which a few drops of liquid soap has been added. Spray it fortnightly.

Growing food is a glorious process. Your kitchen garden will not only enthrall you, it will soothe, surprise and comfort you. Join your local community gardeners and meet fellow food growers.

If you live in Mumbai and would want to know more about balcony gardening, join BLOOMS on Facebook . It is a platform for enthusiastic home gardeners and you can be a part of fun-filled and interactive gardening meets.



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Doing nothing in Bhimtal

Sometimes all it takes to get away and experience true relaxation is to delve right into nature, away from edifices of the noisy, polluted and materialistic cities

■ By Sakshi Nanda



PI: SAKSHI NANDA

"MADAM, LOOK STRAIGHT AHEAD and then a little to your right. I am the tall man in blue waving at you," he said for the third time. I was at Kathgodam station, which is only as big as the size of the food court of New Delhi railway station, waiting with my two boys, to be taken an hour away to a colonial homestay atop a hill in Bhimtal. When I finally spotted the taxi driver I realised he had been five feet away from me, had spent 15 minutes just to make me spot him and was actually a short man in a green shirt! The unexpected nip in the air and the drizzle as we crossed the road made my antennae stand up. *Have I packed enough for my three-year-old? Did my husband keep his wind cheater? Is it going to get colder?*

I brushed off all worry. I had promised my husband that I would relax the feet of my mind and not fuss over whatever roles I played at home. We called our weekend trip the 'Do Nothing Vacation' and that was to include keeping not just sight-seeing lists unborn but also all concerns of the brain standing at ease. Little did I know then that what I had shrugged off with an easier-said-than-done expression was going to become a doable mantra for my vacations.

Much like so many towns of Uttarakhand, Bhimtal too has a lake for a heart, a temple on every hillock and ringlets of red sloping roofs surrounding them all. Typically, one would visit to go boating on the lake, eating noodles by the lakeside, posing by the hills, visiting the Gods and overall, breathing in the idea of a 'hill station'. Not so typically, a tourist might book a homestay a little away from the hustle, carry shoes for easy trekking but also slippers for lounging around and no agenda except to eat fresh home-made food between doing something and doing nothing, alternately.

Doing something

A nursery-goer is a teen only when he reasons

back. At all other times, his feet still fit in shoes not nearly the size of your hands. Which is what we kept in mind when we decided to indulge in three physically-involving activities, if only to rev up the hunger pangs for gorging on the delicious fare our hosts had to offer.

A long, circuitous drive away from our homestay lay Chauli Ki Jaali, in Mukteshwar. I decided to trust the 'Tall, blue shirt' and make that day's sunset special. The moody mountain weather had gone from chilly to sweaty, but oh dear, *"Madam, if AC is on the car doesn't climb"*. Three city-bred spoilt brats dripped their way to what we were told was a breathtaking view from a rocky ledge. It was the absolute truth! As if the mountains were sentinels for a sun which was blushing, trying to hide behind their arms and yet eager to be admired as the clouds made way and stood by. I felt fortunate to have reached in time before it blinked for the night.

Over dinner, the cook told us about the legend associated with the place. How women would crawl through a narrow tunnel and sit perched on a precarious rock to prove their 'morality'. As luck would have it, none in the history of Chauli ki Jaali had lost their life to yet another unfavourably designed



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exam. Would I have survived it? I quickly filled up my mouth with a spoon full of caramel custard. The deliciousness dispelled all needless clouds of doubt.

Snaking through mountain roads as a child always made me wonder what lay beyond and below the fence which marked the edge of a road. Can one see where exactly two mountains meet in a valley overgrown with wilderness? A neat line, perhaps borrowed from a map, and as illusory? I did find out when we three trotted off for a Village Walk in Nathuakhan the next morning. With every step downhill, the paths were increasingly wet and slippery—or not there at all. What was there in abundance though were all shades of green and they were getting darker with the descent. A corn plantation shared apartment space with a cow shed. A few steps below stood a temple tree—old, grand and worshipped. I remember looking up from the bottom right to where we began

at the top, my line of vision crossing houses and curious children, women carrying big bundles of sticks on feet in broken rubber slippers and past cracking sounds of pine cones. The sky looked as blue but the world around me was so far removed from what I witness in Delhi, it is difficult to imagine its existence sitting at my writing desk today. Likewise, the exact mountain scent without feeling nostalgic.

On his father's shoulders, my son climbed all the way up that day, after much convincing that for the cute calf there was not room enough. I looked at my husband's shoes leading, feeling for steady rocks. I wasn't worried, at all. If anything, I was glad to see how the workings of gravity were well known to this clever three-year-old.

The next day, rather encouraged, we decided to trek up to the Ridge, for a picnic. The Ridge is a long and narrow flatland which is essentially the top of a hill, overlooking Sat



Trekking with my little one up to the Ridge

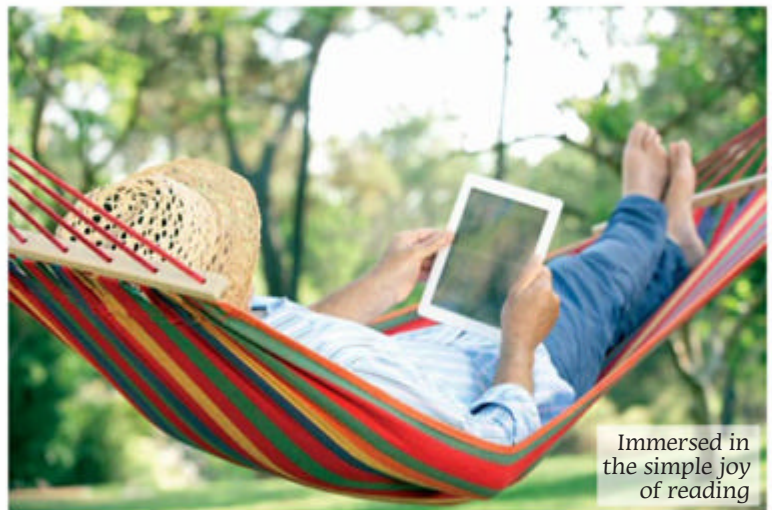
Tal on one side and the main town of Bhimtal on the other. With sticks in hands and the enthusiasm typical of early mornings, three pairs of feet set out to climb towards the prospect of earning their *paranthas* and apple pie. With frequent breaks for gazing at the world below or at the size of wild mushrooms, never seen before, we were finally perched at a point where, call it my hunger talking, everything seemed bite-sized [though not the lovers sitting across from us, disappointed at the intrusion]. There is something about being a family which sharing a meal brings out. If that meal happens to be some miles above the sea level, it's closer to divine in all ways—a sense of oneness that nothing else can make you feel. Not just with one another but also with the nature that surrounds you: the breeze that keeps you cool, the canopy that provides shelter. *Is that what the lovers were thinking sitting where they had walked hand-in-hand, far away from us now, under a tall fir?*

This time, the daddy had done his homework and made the boy collect daisies for his mother all the way down. On his own two feet, walking by himself, rules of gravity forgotten.

But mostly doing nothing

Clocks in cities run much faster than they do in small towns. And on hills they often seem to come to a standstill. While with much bravado I fill you up on all that we did on the spur of the moment over the three days in Bhimtal, it barely covered a fraction of the time we spent doing... well, nothing at all!

How do you do nothing? Can you? Is it possible to empty the mind of all to-dos and tasks, thoughts that bother and deadlines of lives you and me call 'ruts' yet run circles in? It's possible. It's possible to do nothing but lie inside a child's tent, pretend camping and make up stories about the grasshopper that hopped over to get a glimpse of the boy who finished his milk. It's possible to sit a few yards away from this action, with a book, immersed in its joys. It's also possible to just stare into infinity, and at birds who with their fluttering, bring you back to reality. There is enough in nature to create wonder and awe and as many nooks to visit with a beau, a boy, or a book. It is times spent thus that make you feel you did nothing and yet you realise how



Immersed in the simple joy of reading



There is enough in nature to create wonder and awe

Pic: Licensed under [CC BY 2.0] from Sanjoy Ghosh [Flickr]

invaluable they were because you actually filled up those hours doing what you never get enough time to. How refreshing!

This was the first family vacation where I let all today's worries and tomorrow's agendas take wing like grass held up in the wind. It was almost a study in contrasts, of doing and not doing. A hangover of the intoxicating 'letting-go feeling' was carried back to New Delhi, enough to notice the tiny nose runny as soon as we bundled up in the train that was homeward bound but saying with conviction, "You've climbed mountains, my son. What can a silly runny nose do to you?"

The feet of my mind were indeed relaxed.



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Water purifier range by Kent RO



The Kent RO water purifiers have been customised to suit both modular as well as traditional households. They consist of a wide range of purifiers like Kent Wonder, Kent Ace, Kent Grand Plus, Kent Prime, Kent Peel, Kent Super Star, Kent Pride and Kent Supreme. Each of these is designed elegantly and features the best quality membrane along with a four-step purification process, computer controlled membrane change alarm and RO technology to give you pure drinking water at your home.

Price: On Request

No onion and garlic ready meals from Gits

Gits has introduced four new variants to its 'ready meals' collection—*pav bhaji*, *dal makhani*, vegetable *biryani* and *paneer tikka masala*. These mixes are 100 per cent vegetarian and do not contain garlic, onion or any added preservatives.

Price: ₹65 – ₹89



Xbox 360 500GB console with 2 free games

This console features a 500GB hard drive so you can store all your favourite games, television shows, movies, music, pictures and any other content available on Xbox Live Marketplace. It comes with two free games—Call of Duty Black Ops II and Call of Duty Ghosts. It also has an in-built Wifi connection for a faster and easier experience.

Price: ₹19,990



Beauty range from Vagheggi

Italian brand Vagheggi has launched its plant-based skincare range in India. These beauty products are made from over 300 raw material extracts, essential oils and flower molecules. All these ingredients are carefully picked, safe to use and environment friendly.

Price: On request

On the go blender from USHA



The four-fin SS304 stainless steel blades in this blender provide faster and smooth blending—even for frozen ingredients. The anti-slip suction feet prevent the blender from slipping on less friction surfaces. Its 250 Watt motor offers a powerful performance. This product comes with two easy-to-hold sipper bottles and is backed with a two-year warranty. It is available in berry purple and orange crush colour.

Price: ₹2895



MINUS from Unived Healthcare

Formulated with a blend of three natural ingredients like Garcinia cambogia, green coffee bean extract and natural L-

carnitine, this supplement claims to provide long-term and safe weight-loss. It prevents fat accumulation, burns fat and calories and controls appetite without causing dehydration or loss of muscle. When supplemented with a balanced diet and regular exercise, these pills could start showing results in three weeks.

Price: ₹2,400

Crunch rocks and cookies from Get Baked

Get Baked offers a range of crunch rocks and cookies loaded with health benefits. These products are made from nutritional and high quality ingredients. The crunch rocks come in maple, chocolate, cranberry and sugar-free variety, while the cookies are available in cranberry, almond and chocolate chip flavours. The products are free of preservatives and added flavours.

Price: ₹250 – 500 for crunch rocks and ₹200 – ₹350 for cookies



Attitude: Be Bright facewash by Amway



This is a water based gel face wash that is 100 per cent soap free and contains complexion brightening agents. It gently and effectively removes excess oil and impurities from your skin. Formulated with lotus root extracts and vitamin A and E, this face wash gives you bright, even toned, radiant and youthful skin with every wash.

Price: ₹315 for 100ml

Cumin, Coriander and chilli gourmet butter from Murginns

Spice up your *dals* and curries or add flavour to your vegetables, *parathas* or chicken recipes with the sizzling new variant from Murginns. Prepared by combining three of the most commonly used ingredients in Indian households: cumin, coriander and chillies—this butter is sure to please the Indian taste buds.

Price: ₹125 for 125gm

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Misery machines

■ By Manoj Khatri

A FEW DAYS AGO, as I was contemplating about why we humans create misery, it occurred to me that the source of all suffering in my life is *me*. In what might be a divine coincidence, I also discovered that the word 'me' is a convenient acronym for My Ego. My Ego is that part of my self that is completely identified with the ideas of separation from others.

I like to think of My Ego as a misery factory—a fairly large one with several misery machines, which run quietly and have great capacity to produce misery and insanity. Its products are the psychological equivalent of intoxicants like alcohol and drugs. Under their influence, I lose all perspective. The products include judgement, righteousness, comparison, entitlement, anxiety, self-pity, envy, fear [psychological, not instinctive], hatred, possessiveness, anger, guilt, resentment, inferiority complex, revenge and many more.

The misery factory works 24/7 and its raw

material is the collective unconsciousness of all humanity, which is free and available in ample quantity. Its power supply is imagination. The factory has received funding from a society that promotes the idea of separation, conflict and one-upmanship. No wonder nearly all fellow humans also have their own ego factories.

The chief consumer of the products of My Ego is the conditioned mind, which has been led to believe that these products are needed for its survival. But I know that this is a lie. Far from being necessary, these products are highly toxic and act like slow poison that will ultimately annihilate its owner and the entire human species.

Sometimes I wonder if complete lockout is the only solution. On second thoughts, management buyout is a better idea—that way I can take control of the factory and change its core products. What if I found a way to convert the machines into producing bliss instead of misery? What if they start manufacturing life-enhancing substances—tolerance, forgiveness, courage, peace, understanding, respect, freedom, happiness and love?

I figure that one way to make the machines stop making misery and start making bliss is to replace the basic raw material—use consciousness in place of unconsciousness. The trouble is that consciousness is in short supply, its only source being a high degree of presence. I have been experimenting with this for a while and though the research is far from over I am happy to report that I have had an important breakthrough. I have found that I can successfully cut off the factory's power supply using a phenomenon called meditation.

This is how it works: While meditating, my overactive imagination stops and My Ego comes to a grinding halt. But this phase doesn't last and as soon as my imagination returns, the factory starts again and the insanity returns. Still, this has been a useful discovery, because it allows me time and space to cultivate the art of presence which, in turn, helps me produce the raw material for bliss in ample quantities.

The more I meditate, the easier it gets to stay in the present, yielding more and more consciousness, until one day meditation won't be required—I will be simply present. The misery machines will then become bliss machines and My Ego will be transmuted into My Ecstasy, a factory I wouldn't mind owning!



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